How R.W. Chambers' King in Yellow Project Actually Spanned His Entire Career [A Partially Excavated Literary Mystery]

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Introduction:
The central aim of this document is to share what I've found after having read all 87 books written by Robert W. Chambers, the author of The King in Yellow (TKiY), as well as to try to make sense of it. (For those who don't know much about either the author or his magnum opus, I'll be introducing them shortly.) When it comes to sharing these findings, especially the most surprising ones (lost media, meaning lost/hidden sequels; a kind of literary treasure-hunt/proto-ARG; ciphers that concern more than the stories they appear in; Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn connections), I've continually had to face the same challenge: how to present any of this in a way that's palatable when it also requires a career worth of context not to sound made up? If I simplify too much, I run the risk of sounding like I'm seeing things and if I take too long to explain, the message is diluted or nobody takes the time.

My first attempt at sharing my findings somehow managed to combine the worst of both worlds. It was too long (more than a hundred pages) and it read like the overwrought ramblings of someone who's not doing too well. But after months of tinkering with it, removing what was unnecessary and distracting, taking in feedback and adding to it (including new findings), I've come up with this document. All this to say that I hope I've managed to strike a balance of sorts (it's ⅓ less voluminous and contains at least twice the amount of info) and that not much of the following can be skipped or skimmed if you want any of it to make sense. You could always skip the introduction to TKiY, if you're already well-versed, but it's a pretty short and painless recap, albeit not a particularly original one, and it highlights certain elements that are worth keeping top of mind. And fair warning, some of this gets really dark (about as dark as you can imagine).

And a quick warning to the curious concerning AI. (In case you also felt like digging into Chambers and wondered if it could be useful.) I'm pretty sure it's a bad idea to use it to delve

into this unless you really, really know what you're doing. Personally, I tried it and it was close to useless (then again, I'm really bad at using those tools) except to get quick answers to questions that, once upon a time, could have been answered via *that* broken husk of a search engine. The one time I thought I found something cool thanks to it, well, it turned out to be an AI hallucination; a wildly inaccurate translation that "supported" one of my claims/theories (I naively thought translations were entirely safe from that). Thanks-but-no-thanks, I don't want to be told I'm right, I want as accurate as possible information. But more than that, I'm just concerned about the fact that, well, this is already an extremely weird and overwhelming "thing" and if you dive into this bonkers proto-ARG and you bring an hallucinating AI Watson with you, I'm not sure it will end well. And honestly, all the AIs I tried out would just constantly get very basic shit about TKiY wrong.

And you know, personally, I kinda spiralled a couple of times during this research project and that wasn't AI influenced. Thankfully, those were pretty much entirely contained to the written word as it had become my pressure-valve. In fact, in the thick of it, my writing became kind of unhinged. Which, you know, yikes. I can't read most of the "old stuff" I wrote about this without cringing. But at least it didn't impact my day-to-day balance. But if I had taken the aforementioned hallucinating AI Watson with me and took his word for it, maybe that would have tipped me over. Anyway, please don't have a chatbot psychosis over this, it would make for a pretty gross irony. Plus Chambers is not worth it. I mean, the guy is fascinating and I love a lot of his work but he was kind of a jerk. Lastly, if you dig into this, don't hesitate to question the lens I've taken to try to make sense of it. After all, questioning the Chambersian consensus is partly how I arrived anywhere with this. That, a lot of hard work and an absolutely absurd amount of luck. Believe me, there are many, many good reasons why this has flown under the radar until now. And without the crucial previous works of a few individuals who have each uncovered disparate key elements concerning Chambers' writings (more on them later), this simply just wouldn't exist. So yeah, feel free to question this and look into it with fresh eyes, it could be very useful. And, I mean, I'm sure I got some stuff wrong. But hey, I stumbled into this assbackwards and after 92 years (Chambers died in 1933), a lot of the clues/keys necessary to make sense of this are probably gone, so what can just one person do?

[Enter the King] What is The King in Yellow?

TKiY is a collection of short stories written by the American author Robert W. Chambers. It was first published in 1895 to some limited acclaim. It put Chambers' name on the map but it didn't exactly set the word on fire. If TKiY became the horror cult classic that it is now, it's thanks to the championing of many subsequent generations of authors and fans, H.P. Lovecraft and his circle of writer friends being the most notable among them. One could argue that TKiY has been saved from the sands of time owing to the fact Lovecraft integrated aspects of the book and its lore into his own fictional sandbox, the so-called Cthulhu Mythos. To simplify greatly, the Cthulhu Mythos is a shared universe in which Lovecraft and his colleagues would set their stories of cosmic horror. It started out as a literary game of sorts, an excuse for friends and colleagues to reference each other's work and add an air of verisimilitude to their stories. To get an idea of what the effect must have been like, try to imagine yourself in the shoes of a horror fan from the

1920s: you're reading an horror story which aims at some level of documentary-style realism and which rattles off the names of actual real-life grimoires, alongside the names of obscure deities and gods, made up ones like Cthulhu and Azathoth, and dangerous sounding tomes like the Necronomicon and The King in Yellow. Which of those are real? Why do these names reappear in the works of seemingly unrelated authors? It must have added quite the thrill to one's reading experience. An experience that only a happy few had access to; but it eventually grew into something much larger than any of them could have anticipated.

Nowadays, you can hardly throw a rock anywhere without hitting a work of horror fiction that hasn't been influenced by Lovecraft in some way. And thanks to the contribution of subsequent Lovecraftian authors who have expanded upon TKiY's place in the Cthulhu Mythos, TKiY's own influence has grown throughout the years. Although perhaps its reputation and the disproportionate shadow it casts have somewhat obscured what lies underneath. Whatever the case is, TKiY's mark can be felt on tv shows (True Detective), table-top role-playing game (The Call of Cthulhu), video games (Fear & Hunger, No, I'm Not a Human (maybe[1]), Signalis and the Megami Tensei franchise; including Persona and, arguably, the Shinyaku Last Bible sub-series) and diverse internet phenomena (certain entries of the SCP Foundation, the Minecraft ARG Searching For A World That Doesn't Exist). There's even an obscure reference to it in one of the books related to George R.R. Martin's A Song of Fire and Ice series, aka the series that gave birth to Game of Thrones. There have been albums of music inspired by TKiY, films, podcasts and video games based on it (or which have reused certain of its concepts), short stories and novels which have expanded upon its story and world and a great many artists who haven't been shy about acknowledging its importance. One of those being the late Joseph S. Pulver Sr., perhaps the most important contemporary writer of TKiY influenced fiction and the editor of a key anthology of modern Yellow Mythos fiction called Cassilda's Song. I think it would be pretty uncontroversial to say that TKiY's reach has never been so widespread and that it only seems to be growing. And that's despite the fact that, when it comes to the source material, what we've been looking at is only one piece of a much larger puzzle.

But back to TKiY itself. While the book is considered to be a pioneering work of cosmic horror, it also contains elements of science-fiction, fin-de-siècle angst, symbolism[2], historical fiction and most importantly, romance. Some of it takes place in New-York, some of it takes place in the Bohemian Latin Quarter of Paris, some of it in Brittany and some of it seemingly takes place outside of time and space as we know them. Part of the book's success rests on how it ties half of its disparate stories together through a vague but extremely evocative mythology. At its center, we find The King in Yellow. More than the title of Chambers' book, it's also the title of a fictional play. And it's also the name of a mysterious and dreadful entity who resides in lost Carcosa, an otherworldly realm of infinite beauty and danger. In fact, the play concerns the mysterious, barely hinted at tragedy of Carcosa. In the world of the book, the play has not only

[1] Then again, maybe not. That said, it shares some fascinating resonances with TKiY. Actually, let's not mince words, it shares some downright uncanny resonances with Chambers' overarching literary project. And considering that Chambers' work past TKiY is incredibly obscure and his overarching project totally unknown, I highly doubt these resonances were intended. Probably coincidences then, but I can't help but associate it with TKiY in my mind.

[2] Keep in mind that Chambers started writing as a "symboliste" of sorts. The logic of symbolism remains important throughout his entire career and it cannot be ignored if we want to respect Chambers' intentionality.

garnered a reputation for being a wondrous yet evil work of art but also for driving those who read its devilish second act to madness. However, when we take a closer look at the few and fragmentary glimpses we get of its content, or at how its influence manifests in the quote-unquote real world, a somewhat more complicated picture emerges. But one thing is certain, whether the play is a cause or a symptom, whether there are even any causal links to establish, whether it simply resonates with certain human flaws or with experiences of high weirdness and heightened interpersonal crises, something about TKiY relates to the thinning of the veil between this banal reality and something else, something “other”. Cassilda’s Song and Cassilda herself, the similarly named Camilla, Uoht, Aldones, Naotalba, Alar, The Yellow Sign, the Twin Suns of Carcosa, Carcosa itself, the Pallid Mask, The Stranger, The Phantom of Truth, the Lake of Hali, Hastur, Yhtill, Aldebaran and the mystery of the Hyades, all these are pieces of a puzzle with no borders. One of the book’s most well-known passages, which appears at the very beginning with much less context than I’ve just given, illustrates this haunting, dreamlike quality rather nicely :

Camilla: You, sir, should unmask.
Stranger: Indeed?
Cassilda: Indeed it’s time. We all have laid aside disguise but you.
Stranger: I wear no mask.
Camilla: (Terrified, aside to Cassilda.) No mask? No mask!
The King in Yellow, Act I, Scene 2.

Now, let me give you a lightning quick summary of what the different sections of the book are like just to give you a taste of what it consists of. We start off with an epigram from the fictional King in Yellow play, an excerpt called Cassilda’s Song, then the book truly begins. First, a story called The Repairer of Reputations. It’s a sci-fi tale of sorts which takes place in the New-York of the 1920s. It concerns Hildred Castaigne, a man who stands under the shadow of TKiY and who believes he’s about to become King of America. With the influence of Mr. Wilde, a blackmailer who has large webs of connections throughout the nation, as well as the influence of some kind of personal ur-conspiracy text called The Dynasty of Carcosa, Hildred Castaigne comes to believe that his coronation is imminent and that only thing standing in his way is his cousin Louis. Sadly for him, the culmination of his ambitions is rather short-lived and his grasp on reality can and should be questioned. In a sense, Mr. Wilde represents TKiY even more so than the wannabe king himself, as Castaigne’s delusions are more than little amplified by this Mr. Wilde, the titular Repairer of Reputations. Second, we get The Mask. It's a morbid alchemical/Bohemian romance centered around a love-triangle and the discovery of a strange liquid substance that preserves life but also freezes it. It’s also about the lies we tell ourselves and the masks we wear. Appropriately enough, since it features one, it feels like a fever dream.

Third, there’s In the Court of the Dragon. It’s about a guy who falls asleep in church and ends up being pursued by The King in Yellow. The real sin being committed here is the disconnect between one’s concrete actions and one’s inner moral compass (body/heart and soul). Basically not living up to who you should be, morally speaking. Like all stories in TKiY, it’s also about delusions. Fourth, there’s The Yellow Sign. It’s also about the lies we tell ourselves and the

masks we wear but this time there's a visitor from beyond the graves who stalks our painter anti-hero and his model girlfriend. He first does so in the painter's dreams before he eventually starts doing the same in real-life. That worm-like stalker could be said to act as the messenger for TKiY himself. This is where we find the famous thrice repeated line of *"Have You Found the Yellow Sign?"* This is also where we get our first mention of Sylvia Elven (although her last name is never given, contextually speaking, it's made very clear).

Fifth, there's The Demoiselle d'Ys. It's about a young American man visiting Brittany who stumbles into what could be described as a zone where past and present meet while simultaneously existing aside of time. There, our protagonist encounters the princess of the legendary Breton city of Ys. They fall in love but eventually the impossibility of their respective worlds remaining merged brings this romantic idyll to a heartbreaking end. Then, you've got The Prophet's Paradise, the book's transitory phase. Which is perhaps not a story in the classic sense of the term but it is the book's sixth entry. What we have here is a poem/epigraph from Omar Khayyam and 8 original poems by Chambers. I won't summarize them, but let's just say that they are very thematically relevant and that there is one entry called The Phantom which mentions a recurring entity in Chambers' work called The Phantom of the Past. There's also another entry called The Throng which is about Pierrot[3], a stock character from la commedia dell'arte[4], which is about truth and what you can find by looking in the mirror.

Seventh, there's The Street of the Four Winds. The first true Latin Quarter story. It's about a painter named Severn who follows the cat of an ex-flame of his, Sylvia Elven. It's a macabre Poe-esque little story but it's also where all the explicitly supernatural and explicitly KiY-linked elements stop showing up. Reality triumphs over delusions; mostly. Eight, there's The Street of the First Shell. It's a romance set in the war-torn Paris of the Prussian siege of 1870-1871. There's yet another Sylvia in it. Ninth, there's The Street of Our Lady of the Fields. It's a Latin Quarter romance about finding your twin flame. It features the Bohemian crowd of the Latin Quarter, the most important of those guys being the inseparable duo of Clifford and Elliott. Then we get our tenth and final entry, Rue Barrée. It's another story of the Latin Quarter which features returning characters. It's also a love story albeit one that almost ends in a drunken senseless tragedy. Thankfully, by the end of it, the character of Kid Selby exits the stage just as he is about to commit the irreparable.

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[3] There's also a sad-faced Pierrot in In the Quarter, a dead Pierrot in Beating Wings and the following passage in The Moonlit Way: "What a very horrid ending to the moonlit way we took together so long ago!—the lovely silvery path of Pierrot!" / "The story of Pierrot is a tragedy, Thessa! We have been luckier on our moonlit way." / "Than Pierrot and Pierrette?" / "Yes. Death always saunters along the path of the moon, watching for those who take it.... You are very fortunate, Pierrette." Pierrot and Pierrette are also mentioned in the poem Pierrot from With the Band. This is not an exhaustive list.

[4] The commedia dell'arte was an early form of Italian theater. From Wikipedia: "[It] is characterized by masked "types" which are standardised archetypical characters shared across all productions and identified via their names, costumes, and functions in the comedy." This must be kept in mind to understand Chambers' work.

[Is There Anything There?] How We Got Robert W. Chambers So Wrong

Now that the table is set, let's indulge wishful thinking for a short moment. What if Chambers wrote an actual KiY play and hid it in his work? Am I making that claim right now? Well, no. That would be an incredibly far-fetched thing to claim that one of fiction's most infamous cursed objects, one that inspired countless other fictional cursed objects, isn't fictional after all. Or at least, that an actual non-cursed version of it exists. That would mean that the fictional lost/banned play which has inspired countless fictional lost media stories through the years is not only real, but that it is, itself, an actual piece of lost media; one which has been lost for almost a century. That sounds improbable, to say the least. But I used to make that claim with some level of certainty. Why is that? Because of good old wishful thinking (obviously) and because one of the things I found out while reading Chambers' entire bibliography is that he did indeed hide a lot of stuff in his work. And I also came to learn that Chambers seemed to have approached his overarching body of work with a level of intentionality that pretty much no one grants him and that TKiY is actually part of a much larger mythos/project that he kept tinkering with for his entire career.

That claim might sound less far-fetched than the previous one but it still is, isn't it? After all, everyone knows that Chambers wrote half of a masterpiece[5] and then promptly went ahead and sold out. In other words, after giving birth to TKiY, Chambers spent the rest of his career wasting his talent writing middle-brow commercial fiction of little interest. And this is where our first major hurdle comes in. But if Chambers did indeed hide a lot of stuff in his work and if TKiY was indeed part of a larger project, why haven't we heard about it before? Well, the fact that Chambers chose to go about it in the most cryptic way possible is a big part of it. For some reason, probably partly out of frustration with the reception of his work (when someone takes every chance they get, over a period of almost 40 years, to include bitter rants about critics/the public in their novels, that feels like deeply held resentment), he didn't seem particularly inclined to make this obvious to anyone. But haven't there been people who've read all of Chambers' work that should have noticed this? Yes and no. So, there's this very insightful biography on Chambers by Shawn M. Tomlinson whose expanded version I'm currently reading[6] and, well, Mr. Tomlinson has read a lot of Chambers, right? Sure, but the thing is, Mr. Tomlinson worked on his Chambers' biography for decades and he probably read Chambers' bibliography piece by piece over a period of many years. Why is it that relevant? Because I've read all of it in a little more than one year. Honestly, I'm convinced that I wouldn't have made half the connections I've made and given more than a passing thought to half the weird little things that jumped at me, if I didn't have so much fresh information in mind. And I highly doubt I'd have found what I did if I had read all of Chambers' 87 books over a period longer than, say, 3 years. And the possibility

[5] The second half of TKiY is nowhere near as well regarded as the first.

[6] Master of The King in Yellow. Also, some of the biographical information/context that Mr. Tomlinson provides, especially about Katherine *Husted* (a neighbor of Chambers'), which, to my knowledge, no one else has written about in the context of "Chambersian studies", was crucial to all this (something which will be more evident through the companion texts). Kudos to him for having uncovered one of the keys necessary to make sense of this. (I write a bit more which considers that info. elsewhere.)

of reading all of Chambers' bibliography so quickly has kind of only been made possible relatively recently owing to the fact that most of Chambers' work is now easy to access digitally[7]. And perhaps even more importantly, I needed to be aware of some very specific information and to have a very specific mindset going in order to realize certain things (as you'll see). All this to say that while I did work very hard at uncovering all this, I first needed to get incredibly lucky to even have the chance of doing so.

Now, we need to talk about how there are three pieces of commonly accepted wisdom concerning R.W. Chambers and TKiY that have hampered our ability to properly assess Chambers himself, his larger body of work and even TKiY (not all of it, of course, there has been no shortage of great and insightful things that have been written/said about TKiY). In the end, the brunt of "blame" for this sorry situation can be attributed to Chambers for having chosen to go about this like he was making some sort of condescending proto-ARG (alternate reality game) without even announcing it. For now, I'm going to put said three pieces on the table. First, there's the wildly held belief that TKiY is a rather incoherent book. Or at least, that the first half (the first 5 stories) works rather well together and that the second half can be safely discarded without losing much. Partly because it doesn't really have all that to do with what came before it, partly because a lot of people don't think it's very good. In other words, Chambers didn't have it in him, or didn't care to, deliver an entire book which is coherent, purposeful and whole. An understandable belief in many ways, because there are major differences between the first half of the book and its second half and more importantly, well, most short story collections don't tell an overarching story to begin with.

Second, there's the aforementioned almost universally agreed upon consensus that Chambers emptied himself out early in 1895 and that as soon as he made a name for himself, he used that clout to spend the rest of his life writing totally mercenary commercial fiction[8]. That he became a one-man factory of superficial romances (contemporary or historical) and not much else. Which means there are probably not that many individuals who are seriously interested in Chambers' work as a whole. Third, well, there's this misconception that relates to the two previous ones. It's the misconception that it's kind of useless to search for anything that relates to TKiY in the rest of Chambers' work (or that there's anything there that can shine much of a light on it). Or to be more precise, that Chambers might have written a few more TKiY-esque short stories before he finished the process of selling-out but that those basically stop existing after 1898 (with a handful of exceptions) and that, really, it's probably not worth the effort to dig much further since if there's anything that relates to TKiY in there, it's assuredly not very meaningful (and more generally speaking, there's probably just not much of interest there). Sure, Chambers did recycle elements of his mythos for two of his later novels, The Dark Stars and The Slayer of

[7] Not to mention that I've only managed to read so much so quickly (despite not having all the time in the world to sink into this) because I almost exclusively get around by walking (lots of opportunity to listen to stuff everyday) and because text-to-speech apps are now good enough to be able to listen to entire books through those (which I've done for 20 something books), that is, if you don't mind the fact that it doesn't make for a great listening experience. When it comes to audiobooks (or any voice work), I 100% support employing actual people, by the way. It's just that most of Chambers' bibliography isn't currently available in audiobook format.

[8] A consensus that was already quite well established during his life-time.

Souls[9], but recycling elements from your own work saves time and energy[10]. That's probably all there is to it. And if there are passing references to TKiY in the rest of his books, well, those have to be meaningless easter-eggs that Chambers put in there to amuse himself, right? After all, why would he put anything particularly thoughtful in such thoughtless work? Well, all these "lieux communs" have created a storm that has cast a veil over Chambers' work.

And there's a couple more things that have transformed it into a perfect storm. There's Chambers himself but, again, that's pretty self-evident, he chose to be cryptic. But there is also the fact that Chambers wrote 87 books[11]. That's a lot. If he had written only ten books, even if they were all considered absolute trash, I'm sure that long ago, a few dedicated fans of TKiY would have suffered through them to see if there was anything of interest there. But 87 books[12]? And many of them are rather long novels? (To be fair, six of them are fairly short children's books, five are novellas and one is a poetry collection.) That's too much. Which is, in a sense, rather useful if you want to hide certain things in plain sight. Especially if there isn't much of a crossover between fans of your earlier more artsy stuff and fans of your mainstream romantic fiction (which I imagine is practically an extinct breed, nowadays). There are probably quite a few fans of TKiY who tried to read Chambers' entire bibliography but who, at some point, decided to cut their losses after going through one too many bad books or realizing how much time it takes to read 87 books. I'm a huge apologist for Chambers' work, as you'll see, but you'll never hear me claim that he didn't write a lot of garbage. And considering that there isn't really anybody to offer guidance out there, to highlight which books are actually worth your time, you could easily pick 10 Chambers books that sound interesting and end up with 10 bad books. Personally speaking, I'm not sure I would have persevered in my deep dive if my first post-1898

[9] As pulp historian Rick Lai has shown. He is cited concerning this in the relevant an entry of the Arc Dream/Kenneth Hite-annotated edition TKiY.

[10] There are several examples of lazy recycling in Chambers' career (like when he took a ten-years old novella of his, The Adventures of a Modest Man, and added a bunch of unrelated stories to make it a "novel"), so that doesn't help.

[11] I count John Tom Alligator and Others (1937) amongst them despite being credited to Chambers' own son, Robert *Husted* Chambers, because I believe that many, if not all, of the stories in that collection have at the very least been co-written by Chambers himself. Not only are these stories perfectly aligned with Chambers' own concerns (thematic or otherwise), but they also reuse very specific imagery, character types (Jimmy Bow-legs aka The Maker of Magic vs. Yu-Lao aka The Maker of Moons; Westcourt vs. all those characters with the -court suffixes to their surname) and phraseology (A Matter of Interest vs. A Matter of Medicine) and they fit the same narrative molds that Chambers liked to reuse throughout his career (Loaves of Fishes is a variation of Cuckoo, False Cape is a variation of The Demoiselle d'Ys, John Tom Alligator is a variation of The Little Misery, et cetera). Not to mention that Our Lady of Lances concerns a character who's mentioned in Quick Action (1914). One could argue that this represents no more than Chambers' influence on his son but the sheer volume of correspondences between the stories in John Tom Alligator and Others and Chambers' entire bibliography makes it unlikely to be just that. Especially when you take into consideration the content of The Snows of Yesteryears which we'll explore later on.

[12] Or 89 if you count Smith's Battery (1898) and A Story of Primitive Love (1920) which are entirely made entirely out of reprinted material.

Chambers books had been the likes of The Happy Parrot[13] (a horrible, morally bankrupt book) or The Flaming Jewel (utterly soporific) or Police!!! (unsufferable).

And that's not even all. Probably owing to the fact that TKiY has rarely been approached as coherent work, it was published without its second half when it came out in France. Not only was TKiY's first half translated pretty late[14] but it took until 2007 for a complete French version of the book to be realized. Why is this important? Because there have been decades during which we didn't get as many French eyes on Chambers as we might have had otherwise. And if we had had more French eyes on Chambers, maybe one of those happy few who believes that TKiY is purposeful and whole would have been a French-speaker. And maybe that French speaker would also have been au-fait with Breton folklore and realized that there exists a book which has perhaps been just as influential (if not more) to TKiY than both An Inhabitant of Carcosa and Haïta the Shepherd combined[15]. That's Le foyer breton by Émile Souvestre.And just so you know, there is a side-character from that book that was repurposed by Chambers for The Demoiselle d'Ys (and you can be sure of that repurposing because he has an uncommon name and because he keeps the same nationality and role). That's a minor example but it has the benefit of being undeniable. And while Le foyer breton has already identified as an important influence on Chambers by the previously mentioned Rick Lai,[16] there's just one problem: Mr. Lai was probably not a French-speaker. So despite unearthing one of the most crucial keys to all of Chambers' work (for which we should be extremely grateful), Mr. Lai couldn't have realized the full-extent of that books' importance. Indeed, there is no complete English translation of that book and the most important part of it wasn't included in what was translated. We'll get back to it, but let's just say that there is a specific version of a legend in that book that sheds a lot of light on the tragedy of Carcosa. So yeah, more French-speaking "eyes" would have been very useful to make sense of all of this much earlier.

The final hurdle pertains to what came before. It doesn't take very long to explain but I'll have to go on a slight tangent after telling you about it. TKiY being a book of weird fiction with elements of the science-fictional and of the fantastical, it of course makes sense that if you wanted to read more stuff by Chambers that had some of that KiY-flavor, you'd aim for anything that's at the very least scifi/fantastical/weird adjacent. Makes sense but that also makes for an accidental red

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[13] Which is in no way shape or form a children's book despite what it currently says on Wikipedia. A bizarre claim (or mistake, I imagine) considering it contains some of the goriest imagery in all of Chambers' writings. But that's only one of the several curious mistakes and omissions currently plaguing Wikipedia when it comes to Chambers. For example, Marooned from Barbarians (1917) is hardly "a strong return to his old weird style" (another bizarre claim considering the fact that L'Ombre is also in Barbarians, that it is a clear variation on The Demoiselle d'Ys (it even mentions Ys) and that it contains actual weird elements) and it is not called Marooned at all. As a story it's called Cuckoo (it was first published under that name) and Marooned is only the title of the first chapter that constitutes how that story was divided up when it was repurposed into Barbarians (the second chapter keeps the name of the original story; same with L'Ombre). And there's The Hi-Jackers which is not the name of a novel but rather the name of the first part of Marie Halkett (1923). In the same vein, Romance is just one of the serialized parts of The Special Messenger (1909). As for omissions, one of them is the fact that the entry for The Haunts of Men (1898) notes that Ambassador Extraordinary "feature less distinguished reappearances of some of the characters" from TKiY but it fails to mention that so do Enter the Queen and Another Good Man (the inseparable duo of Clifford and Elliott features in all three).

[14] Le roi de jaune vêtu (1976). A slightly more cumbersome title than Le roi en jaune but also a more evocative one.

[15] Those two being stories by Ambrose Bierce from which Chambers repurposed a few key elements, including the names of Carcosa, Hastur and Hali.

[16] The article in which this is discussed can be read here.

herring. Chambers' weird-adjacent books are the following: In Search of the Unknown, The Tracer of Lost Persons, The Tree of Heaven, Some Ladies in Haste, The Green Mouse, The Gay Rebellion, Athalie, Quick Action, Barbarians, The Dark Stars, The Slayer of Souls, Police!!! and The Talkers[17]. Turns out that several of those are not only very far from being amongst Chambers' best work but that they also don't do much to illuminate anything about TKiY or Chambers himself… unless you already know a lot about him and his work. (The Talkers being the most important exception.) But guess in what books we often find quite a bit more TKiY DNA than in those? In the last places you'd/we'd expect, in his New-York high society romance. Check out this excerpt from The Younger Sets:

Dry-lipped he looked at her, and dry of eye and lip she raised her head and stared at him—through him—far beyond at the twin ghosts floating under the tropic stars locked fast in their first embrace.
Then she rose, blindly, covering her face with her hands, and he stumbled to his feet, shrinking back from her—because dead fires were flickering again, and the ashes of dead roses stirred above the scented embers—and the magic of all the East was descending like a veil upon them, and the Phantom of the Past drew nearer, smiling, wide-armed, crowned with living blossoms.
The tide rose, swaying her where she stood; her hands fell from her face. Between them the grave they had dug seemed almost filled with flowers now—was filling fast. And across it they looked at one another as though stunned. Then his face paled and he stepped back, staring at her from stern eyes.
"Phil," she faltered, bewildered by the mirage, "is it only a bad dream, after all?" And as the false magic glowed into blinding splendour to engulf them: "Oh, boy! boy!—is it hell or heaven where we've fallen—?"

If that doesn't remind you of the trip to Carcosa from The Court of the Dragon, I don't know what to tell you. And, I mean, the Phantom from the Past from TKiY is literally right there. And wouldn't you know, but these kinds of otherworldly and dreamy passages are part and parcel of those books. In The Firing Line[18], you also have such a passage which is about The Phantom of the Future and which ends with this line: *"The Phantom of the Future was laid"*. Compare it to this bit in TKiY: *"... the Phantom of Truth was laid"*. Oh, and you also have a *"spectral ocean [that] stretche[s] away under the stars"* and whose waves are described as *"ghostly rollers [which] thund[er] along the sand"*. Kind of like *"the cloud waves [that] roll and break on the shores of Hali"* in TKiY. And what's wild is that although some of Chambers' high society romances aren't so hot, many of them are. I'd have no trouble calling The Fighting Chance, The Firing Line, The Common Law and The Streets of Ascalon great books and I'm not even particularly fond of romances. To be fair, I absolutely love Chambers' prose (when he's not just

[17] The Cardigan series flirts with the supernatural at times (arguably, there's a handful of moments that simply are) but it's mostly in the historical vein. There are a few science-fictional inventions in non-genre novels (Lorraine, The Cambric Mask, The Younger Sets) but those are very minor elements. Similarly, The Firing Line contains a scene of a séance in which something supernatural arguably happens.
[18] It also contains a very conspicuous mention of a yellow rose and of a key which relates to it (and to the Rosicrucians). The yellow rose is an image which appears only twice in Chambers' 87 books: in TKiY and in The Firing Line. It appears just before the protagonists go on their night-time stroll by the spectral ocean and stumble into a sort of atmospheric fairyland which resembles the lengthier excerpt that I've just quoted. More on all that later.

slumming it) so if you love TKiY despite its prose instead of because of it (or in part because of it), your mileage may vary. But they are not just great because of their prose.

Although I've removed basically all personal flights of fancy from this version of this explainer, please allow me illustrate something about Chambers' high society romances through my own lived experience. I assure you this is relevant. My job is in the mental health sector and many of the people I work with struggle with anxiety and mood disorders, C-PTSD/Personality disorders (let's not open that can of worms right now) and traumas which are impacting how they function in their day to day. Why am I bringing this up? Because while I don't actively go looking for media about these topics, from time to time it really jumps at me how much, say, character so-and-so is acting exactly like person so-and-so whom I know from work and whom I'm trying to help deal with the impacts of X-Y-Z in their life. And well, there are moments in those high society books that have reminded me so strongly of people that I've met in my career that I felt completely blindsided. For example, there's a scene in The Fighting Chance which illustrates the confrontation between a wife and husband, Lily and Leroy Mortimer, that concerns the fraudulent use of a cheque which was filled in by a guy whose surname is Plank[19]. It happens to be one of the best depictions of narcissistic abuse I've ever read in a book (especially when it comes to the thought process of the one enacting the abuse and the confusion/sense of being overwhelmed of the one living through it). Seriously, I was both triggered and exhilarated by the verisimilitude of that scene while reading it. This isn't fluff. Except they kind of look like they are fluff and sometimes even read (in parts) like they are. So, if you go in thinking it's going to be all surface level romantic fluff, I'm pretty sure that's exactly what you'll see. But sometimes the surface doesn't reflect the depths.

Frankly, there is something almost Kafka-esque about Chambers' high society novels. Navigating alienation and trying to forge actual connections in a world where people are always wearing masks is at the core of those books. There is another scene worth going into from The Fighting Chance which is about the aforementioned Plank, the nouveau riche. He goes to a party and realizes that everyone around him is really just tolerating him because he's useful to them. He realizes that this is a milieu where relationships are purely transactional (and that they obviously have to do with matters of family clans, class and "good breeding"). He realizes that no one there is being honest, not even with themselves. And more importantly, he also realizes that even some of the best people amongst them, morally speaking, have so deeply integrated that way of functioning that they no longer realize when they are being manipulative. The heroine then shows up, sees Plank and pretends to be interested in his well-being just so she can extract information from him while remaining "masked" (figuratively speaking). Not even realizing she's really just using him. But Plank has become resigned to being used and he tries to bear it with a smile. And there's Strelsa Leeds from The Streets of Ascalon. A seemingly superficial socialite who is actually an intelligent and sensible young woman, albeit a deeply traumatized one. Groomed to be an instrument of social climbing by her mother, abused, terrorized and humiliated by her first husband who saw her as nothing more than his property, Strelsa has never known what it's like to live, only what it's like to survive. At the start of the book, her husband has recently died and she discovers what she has been missing all these

[19] Plank's cheque becomes a bit of a blank cheque for Leroy. Ha-ha-ha. Very funny, Robert.

years. I mention Strelsa because some of her actions in the book are so obviously steeped in trauma responses that they become quite hard to witness. Especially when her newly-found sense of security is brutally yanked out from under her.

And there's one of our keys to all this, Louis Malcourt. He's a character from The Firing Line. The way that this book describes how Malcourt is dealing with dissociation and suicidal ideations is so raw, specific, evocative and true to life (same for how the people around him react) that I had to put the book down more than once because it got to be too much for me[20]. That has never happened to me with a book before. And people said those books are cheap, unserious and superficial romances. Although, to be fair, several of Chambers' novels unfortunately are that and even some of those which have great stuff in them can feel rather diluted. Perhaps none more so than the novel Eris which you get the feeling could have been an absolutely outstanding novella. Sadly, Chambers drowned some of his best writing in padded out mediocrity. In a sense, most of his novels are like the inverse of why his best short stories work so well. To me, if there's a strength that is shared across all stories in TKiY, it's that, for every single story, you get the feeling that an entire novel's worth of content was distilled into a relatively short page count[21]. Which means you're missing some context, sure, but it has the benefit of leaving you with only the most resonant bits and of letting your imagination fill the gaps in your understanding. Despite that, I'd go as far as saying Chambers wrote at least five great/near-great novels. Which is more than most writers.

But so far, so what? All I've "proven" is that maybe Chambers had some interesting things to say even after he wrote TKiY and that he might be a better author than given credit for. Well, believe me, it's really primordial for you to know that Chambers didn't give up on writing quality stuff after TKiY (although he would definitively sometimes just phone it in). And like I said earlier, it eventually became clear to me that there is much more intentionality behind a lot of the artistic decisions that Chambers' took than most people gave/give him credit for. But the germ for that belief was seeded even before I started my deep dive. If Youtube's release date is to be believed, this amateur research project started very shortly after December 9, 2024. Because that's the date on which Flawed Peacock released a video essay called "The King in Yellow - Stories Explained". A video essay which I finished watching only a few days after its release, if memory serves me right. That video is the most thorough analysis of The King in Yellow, the

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[20] Even though it is delivered by the third-person narrator, this line in particular just killed me because the very last bit is clearly (if you've read the book and have the full context) something that Malcourt himself believes: "His mood was inspired by that odd merriment which came from sheer perversity. When the depths and shallows of his contradictory character were disturbed a ripple of what passed for mirth covered all the surface; if there was any profundity to the man the ripple obscured it. No eye had ever penetrated the secrecy of what lay below; none ever would. Perhaps there was nothing there." I don't know how to describe it any other way than as both profoundly sad and existentially terrifying (and, well, it also is incredibly suggestive of something). And if that doesn't perfectly illustrate the utterly alienating feeling of being too dead inside, I don't know what does. Speaking of alienation, here's just one more line that relates to Malcourt: "[T]here's no way out of anything for me—while I live—down here [....] [o]n this exotic planet called the earth [...]. "I'm a sort of moon-calf—a seed blown clear from Saturn's surface, which fell here and sprouted into the thing you call Louis Malcourt." A tiny bit later we get the following descriptive passage: "The sun, over the Adirondack foot-hills, hung above bands of smouldering clouds. Presently it dipped into them, hanging triple-ringed, like Saturn on fire" and a farewell scene that's just as heartbreaking as it is dread inducing.

[21] According to a contemporary profile of Chambers, he was a "merciless amputator" of his own work. So who knows, maybe that's kind of what he actually did. Maybe he should have done that with his novels, but I doubt that would have been less commercially viable.

book, that anyone could ask for. Armed with Kenneth Hite's top-notch annotated version of The King in Yellow and his own finely-tuned abilities to dive deep into any work of art, Flawed Peacock decided he would dissect every single story and poems that constitute The King in Yellow and that resulted in an incredible 8 hours long video.

You don't need to watch it to understand the following but I certainly recommend you do if you're into TKiY (or want to understand why some people might love that book or if just want to hear about really fascinating stuff). But whether you choose to watch it or not, what you need to know is that it's probably not something you can sit through without coming out the other way with one very strong conviction. At least I don't think so. I'm talking about the conviction that TKiY is a coherent, purposeful and intricately woven piece of literature. Personally speaking, once I was done watching, I was utterly convinced that TKiY cannot be split in two, that it's not an incoherent book and that it was meant to be taken in as a whole. While I won't summarize Flawed Peacock's video, I will get back to why that is in a little while. For now, let's just say it has a lot to do with its themes, yes, but more precisely it has to do with how these themes are reflected through the book's symbols and even its very structure. Actually, if you watch it, Flawed Peacock's video will probably leave you with way more than one conviction. It might also leave you convinced that there is a massive difference between the kind of cosmic horror that H.P. Lovecraft, its most famous practitioner, wrote the kind of cosmic horror that Chambers himself wrote. And it might also convince you that love is the key to Chambers' work, including TKiY. Anyway, I already had an interest in Chambers before watching that video but as you can guess, it galvanized that interest like nothing I could have imagined. And to make a long story short, this made me want to dive deep into Chambers' work. Which I did, to the point of reading every single book he ever wrote. Now, I didn't go in expecting to find out that we had gotten Chambers completely wrong, but I did hope to find a little more stuff of interest that one would typically expect from Chambers. But what I certainly didn't expect is to find out that, for pretty much the entirety of his career, he was playing some kind of literary game with his unaware reading public.

[Enter the Queen] Sylvia Elven Is the Key

Now, I imagine that some of you would probably like to hear about Carcosa as soon as possible and I get it. Not only do I get it but my first instinct for this new explainer document was not to include the following section. And when I finally realized that no, actually, this absolutely needed to be in it, I thought about putting it at the very end. But after much consideration, I believe that what will follow needs to be addressed before we go on. Anyway, what if we took this excerpt from The Common Law seriously?:

[N]o man ever created anything in which he did not include a sample of himself—if not what he himself is, at least what he would like to be and what he likes and dislikes in others. No creator who shows his work can hope to remain entirely anonymous. [...] But I'm one of those nobodies who cherish a degenerate belief that man comes first, and then his works, and that the main idea is to get through life as happily as possible with the minimum of inconvenience to others.

[...] And if you've got to criticise the work, for God's sake do it with your hand on the man's shoulder."

Let's do just that. From 1885/1886 to 1893, Chambers studied in Paris at the École des Beaux-Arts and the Académie Julian. From 1894 to 1933, Chambers would keep bringing up the names of people (or rather, characters inspired by those people) and places he associated with this period of his life. As the cliché goes, they were the best of times, they were the worst of times. At least one imagines it was so from what we can glean of Chambers' own work. Reginald "Rex" Gethryn, the protagonist of In the Quarter is a twenty-something American student who receives an ultimatum from his rich family. They give him three more years in Paris, but it's clear that they are losing patience. They want concrete proof that he isn't just pissing away their money and that they're not just subsidizing his decadent Bohemian lifestyle. He has to get his paintings accepted at the Paris Salon and that's that. Rex, which is King in Latin, is for all intent and purposes a self-insert protagonist. Pretty much everything about him corresponds to Chambers' own experience. Everything but the surface details, like the fact that King's benefactor is his aunt and not his parents. And, well, Rex isn't doing so great psychologically speaking. In fact, by the end of the book (spoilers), it's heavily implied that he has decided to quit the race early. Chambers' first two books feature suicide prominently, but for the rest of his career, suicide is more of an undercurrent. Except when it suddenly erupts with full force.

Like I said earlier, in The Firing Line, there are extended passages of suicidal ideation which I found very harrowing. Here is a very interesting line from the character of Louis Malcourt which I'd like to share with you: *"O hell! I'm talking like an autobiography! Don't go, if you can stand it for a moment longer; I'm never likely to do it again."* Doesn't mean much, doesn't mean anything at all. Except there are so many specific elements of who Malcourt is and of what he has lived through that keep popping up in Chambers' work. Most central of which are the scars that are left by a childhood of total loneliness and neglect (when it's not outright abuse). One of Chambers' most memorable characters, the heroine of The Danger Mark, develops a drinking problem at the age of 7 years old. She becomes an alcoholic before she's even reached her teenage years. In Chambers' work, childhood is almost never free from the shadow of trauma. And another shadow which had seemingly haunted Chambers for most of his life is the shadow of Sylvia Elven. If we want to understand who Chambers is, we need to talk about Sylvia. Or rather we need to talk about the three Sylvia Elven that we find in Chambers' work[22]. One hides behind a fake name, one is a character from a fictional opera and one is found dead, wrapped in silk. Just like there are three Ysonde in Chambers' work, all twin flames to a Chambersian stand-in (one of which is called Bobby). There are also three very important Tessie to be found. There's one from a poem about spring (like Tessie, Sylvia Elven is directly associated with changing seasons). There's Tessie Reardon[23] who's a model and who features in The King in

[22] Speaking of Elven, we find the surname of Ylven in The White Shadow and there is a Baroness of Elven in The Maids of Paradise.

[23] Reardon is an Irish name. As it will become very apparent, there's a Chambersian archetype who's often of Irish or French (sometimes Breton, another Celtic Nation, like Sylvia) extraction, who often has red-hair and who despite coming from a poor background is either associated with royalty/nobility through name/symbol/et cetera or because they are literally revealed to be of noble/royal blood. Unsurprisingly then, Reardon is an anglicisation of Ó Ríordáin. Rí is Irish Gaelic for king and the whole name means "royal bard". Let's also keep in mind that Tessie is a diminutive of Teresa/Theresa ("to harvest or reap" or "summer").

Yellow. Concerning that second Tessie, it is worth noting that although she dies of supernatural causes, one could argue that her death is also the fault of a man called Jack Scott, her painter-lover. The last one is Tessie Delmour ("of the sea" or "from the pond") from Outsiders[24], Chambers' second most obviously autobiographical novel after In the Quarter.

The last of these Tessies is friends with Sylvia Tring ("slope where trees grow") and she also happens to be a model. She commits suicide after her painter-lover, Ivan Lacroix, abandons her. It's a matter of class, career and most importantly, reputation. In the novel The Slayer of Souls, a character identifies stealthier kinds of slayers than the titular one, "the slayers of reputations". And of course, the very first story of The King in Yellow is called the Repairer of Reputations. The importance of reputation is something that comes up again and again and again, it is obviously not something that Chambers takes lightly. Is the dead Sylvia Elven another model who has committed suicide? The character who finds her corpse, Severn, is a painter after all. And practically all of the women with whom these painter guys ever hang out with in Chambers' stories are models. In fact, I don't think there is a single painter character of note who doesn't, at least at some point, date a model. Like Elven, the name Severn reappears a few times in Chambers' work. And Severn is almost the mirror image of the name Nevers which is another important surname. Not to jump the gun too much, but slightly off mirroring is very common in Chambers And just so you know, many of Chambers' heroines have the names of cities or places. Sylvia Elven, Lorraine, Whistling Cat, Cintra, Ormond, et cetera. Hell, I think there is a sly reference to that fact in The Firing Line. There's a passage that goes like this : *"I care for no other epitaph than the names of counties, cities, streets which we have named with our names"*. People are like landscapes as my favorite podcaster once said. And, you know, there are decades separate the first (1895) and last mention of someone called Elven (1927). He never forgot that name, it must have meant something.

Anyway, let me tell you about another artist who might just be a variation on the Jack Scott character (a less selfish one, that is) or his apotheosis. In The Common Law, Louis Neville seeks to marry his model, Valerie West, something which causes an uproar in his family and social milieu. A matter of class again. But as the people around him meet Valerie, they come to realise the absurdity of their prejudices. Louis' first ally in the matter is his brother-in-law. But who's his most ardent opponent? His sister, Lily Collis, a fascinatingly frustrating character (who feels very true to life), who in theory wouldn't mind them marrying but who in practice will do anything to preserve the family's so-called reputation. Funnily enough, she expects Louis and Valerie to break up, not to feel bad about it and not to be angry at her for forcing them to break up. She wants what she wants, but not the consequences that come with it. She also happens to be one of those actors-characters from Chambers' own little commedia dell'arte troop who reappears under different guises and different names. Usually under the guise of a mother. Actually, Lily is herself a mother[25], just not the mother of Louis. Speaking of which, there's a mother in the novel Athalie who also opposes her son marrying outside his own class (which

[24] À propos of nothing but Chambers' description of "The Iron City" (New York) reminded of certain passages from The Pale Brown Thing/Our Lady of Darkness by Fritz Leiber. More specifically, the stuff relating to Thibaut de Castries' "megapolisomancy". That's a Lovecraftian novel which involves Lovecraft himself in its plot, as well as Clark Ashton Smith and Ambrose Bierce.

[25] I'm pretty sure that she's the only sister of a protagonist that even has children.

ends up causing no end of suffering since he ends up marrying a high-society nightmare woman instead of his working class twin flame). She eventually comes to regret her opposition but only after she dies. Athalie is a novel about spiritualism, in case you were wondering. In The Talkers, there's another opposing mother (a matter of class again) and the book ends with her realizing that she's on the verge of irrevocably damaging her relationship with her son. She relents and the Chambersian hero gets to have his happily ever after with a character nicknamed The Queen in Green. A nice fantasy, but maybe not what happened to Chambers[26]. And as Chambers' biographer Shawn M. Tomlinson has astutely observed, his work is not just full of autobiographical elements, it's full of fantasies, it's full of cope. Like in the Outsiders, where Oliver Locke comes back from an education in Europe and manages to become a successful New York writer without ever having to compromise on his artistic vision. You know, unlike a certain Chambers who became the number one writer of popular romances by appealing to the middle-brow public. But let's get back to Schrödinger's Sylvia. Listen to this excerpt from TKiY:

It is a pretty name, Sylvia Elven. Sylvia is a woman's name, Elven is the name of a town. In Paris, in this quarter, above all, in this Street of the Four Winds, names are worn and put away as the fashions change with the seasons. I know the little town of Elven, for there I met Fate face to face and Fate was unkind. But do you know that in Elven Fate had another name, and that name was Sylvia?

Names are worn and put away. And elsewhere Chambers connects cats to destiny. Like I said earlier, it's Severn, a painter, who finds her body at the end of the story she appears in and he does so by following her cat. Follow the cat, follow destiny. The 1902 reedition of The King in Yellow has an illustration for this scene and it shares many similarities with a supposedly fictional painting called The Witch. A painting by a very Chambers-like character[27] in The Danger Mark. One that includes the presence of a black cat. Only the Puritan is missing, but I think he's just out of sight. Like Severn is. Like Chambers was. Or at least, that is the case if one believes that the story Another Good Man contains biographical elements (the American "nouveau" of that story is, if I recall correctly, the only "Latin Quarter nondescript[28]" to be explicitly tied to Brooklyn where Chambers was born). Speaking of which, there are also three meaningful Sara ("princess" or "noble lady") and the most important one features in Another Good Man. Another one is Sarah Lalo, a model with an abusive father from The Red Republic. Her name is almost assuredly meant as reference to Édouard Lalo, of Le roi d'Ys fame[29]. The

[26] From what little we know of Chambers' relationship with his son, it seems he might have repeated his mother's mistake. I took note of a character musing about the fact that we tend not to apply what we believe in when it comes to dealing with our own family but I can't find it again in the absolute glut of information I've amassed.

[27] It seems that book might actually reveal what the three paintings by Chambers that got accepted at the Paris Salon actually were (or partly, maybe). There is a contemporary newspaper story that mentions Chambers skipping the exposition because he was so non-chalant and because he so didn't care; I call bullshit on that. I hope that by now it has become clear that Chambers was one of the least non-chalant people that has ever lived but he clearly wanted to be perceived as such (the "I don't really care attitude" is very prevalent in contemporary profiles about him), like most extremely chalant people.

[28] An expression that Chambers uses in … . There is an exchange in one of the Latin Quarter stories that almost feels like a sly acknowledgement that several of those characters are the same person (I would wager that this includes Chambers split in several entities).

[29] One could argue King Gradlon is an abusive father (if you read the story in a certain way). And one must take into consideration that Lalo himself is mentioned in Enter the Queen. Also, see the part about The Red Republic and Carcassonne later on.

Sara from Another Good Man, who is depicted as the queen of the Latin Quarter (a red-haired queen with gray-green eyes), doesn't have a surname but there is a conspicuous mention of a Lalou at some point. And I think that's a case of two allusions with one stone (something Chambers loved to do) because a lot of his characters have prominent "O" sounds or letters in their names, like Anne O'Hara and Eris Odell. Most are also red-heads. Anyway, one year after The King in Yellow, Chambers had his novel Witch Sylvia published. Like a witch, a sorceress or a sybil, not like I was asking you a question about which Sylvia it is. But that would have been fitting. Or rather, it was to have been called Witch Sylvia according to a contemporary issue of The Century Magazine[30]. It came out under the name A King and a Few Dukes. In any case the character of Queen Sylvia of Marmora remains the book's actual hero and she's still mostly referred to as Witch Sylvia.

Any other characters associated with witches? Well, there's Camilla. Not the one from The King in Yellow, the one from Ailsa Page. Almost the first thing we learn about Camilla is that she is a sibyl and that she has predicted the death of someone's peace of mind. Meanwhile, her character's real introduction takes place in chapter two. What happens just before she enters the scene? A neighbor's cat enters the scene. And that passage almost reads like Camilla is herself the cat. Like witches who can transform into cats. And well, women are constantly compared to (domesticated) cats, wild cats and big cats. But we must get back to Sylvia. Did she die, did she kill herself? At first, I was inclined to believe so, but now I'm not sure (I mean, she's dead now but that goes without saying). In The Maids of Paradise, the preface rather doubtfully claims that this not particularly realistic historical romance is based on actual events and that it is in fact a sort of "roman à clef[31]". The literal translation of the French term is a novel with a key[32]. That means a novel which fictionalizes real events and which gives imaginary names to real people. But frankly, if that book is a roman-à-clef, all of his books could be[33]. In said preface, Chambers claims that Sylvia Elven is still alive. But that could be cope, right? But would one think that Sylvia didn't kill herself? Well, there's a passage in The Yellow Sign where Jack Scott[34], the painter protagonist, says this:

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[30] Source.

[31] He writes that "certain localities and certain characters have been sufficiently disguised to render recognition improbable" and he ends the preface by wishing one of those persons well.

[32] The Maids of Paradise might itself be a key to a lot of things. Oh, and while it's almost assuredly just standard verisimilitude-signaling, on the back of my copy of The Fifth Horseman, there is a blurb about the historical romances of RWC and it has the two following lines: "These novels, while separate and distinct stories in themselves, each play their part in the author's main design" and "*Remember* [it's italicized], the majority of the characters are real and so are the episodes concerning them." Then again, there is a least one weird comment by Chambers in a newspaper column (the one about women and shells) that seems to be a reference to an aspect of this literary game and there are rather intriguing advertisements, illustrations (like the very orange-coded The Drums of Aulone which has illustrations that emphasize orange above all else) and other par-literary elements that makes one wonder if Chambers didn't ask for things to be made in a specific way (and he might have had the power to do so as he was, after all, one of the richest and most successful authors of his time).

[33] And maybe they are since, like I've been alluding too, he reuses the same rotating cast of "actors" over and over. I haven't systematized anything so I can't say I've identified a definitive cast, but this will make even more sense when we get to the color-coding and the more explicit explanations of certain archetypes.

[34] Probably one of those characters who represent Chambers pretty directly. A fragment of him, anyway.

The one passion of my life lay buried in the sunlit forests of Brittany. Was it buried for ever? Hope cried "No!" For three years I had been listening to the voice of Hope, and for three years I had waited for a footstep on my threshold. Had Sylvia forgotten? "No!" cried Hope.

So if he's asking himself if she has forgotten, maybe she's not dead. Perhaps what died in Brittany is Sylvia's relationship with Chambers and well, maybe something else. Here's an out of context line from The Fire-Warden, "*I know The Witch doesn't care, but I can't help loving her.… Are you properly impressed with my grief?*" That line is allegedly about some horse, but I'll let you judge if it really is. Maybe Chambers never stopped loving Sylvia, but maybe she did. Why? Maybe because they lost the child they intended to raise together. Now, you're probably thinking that I'm starting to lose it, but here me out. Or don't hear me out if you don't want to hear about a sexual assault, this is about to get dark. Some of Chambers' work feels oddly chaste, some of it feels raunchy just below the surface, but sex is often alluded to in a more ambivalent sort of way, sometimes with suspicion.

And while certain characters in Chambers' work are clearly committing banalized sexual harassment, there are times when he is surprisingly good at depicting how exhausting and scary it must be for women to be living in a culture of rape (and there are a few rather harrowingly depicted rape attempts in several of his books). The best example is in The Fifth Horseman[35]. That book is quite hard to read for its first half because it follows Josephine Moreland, a girl who is sexualized by almost everyone around her from an alarmingly young age. And almost nobody in her community does anything about it except punish her for lashing out or punish her for wanting to be left the hell alone with her imagination and her books, for wanting to be invisible. Nowhere is safe for Josephine, not even home because that's where she faces the most insistent form of sexual harassment from her mother's guests (their house becomes a sort of gambling den during the evening). And what makes it possible for the abuse that Josephine endures to continue? It's the sacrosanct concept of reputation. In order to protect the reputation of a person, a family, a community or an institution, some people are ready to sacrifice their morals. Better to safeguard the so-called reputation of the family rather than have the crimes that one of its members has committed be revealed to the light of day. Revealed for all to see. Better to live under a dark sun of lies than under the rays of a sun that lays bare the crimes and the complicity of some people. But the sun is often a great disinfectant and by willingly casting shadows on the crimes of abusers, we create an environment where they can thrive, where they can continue to do harm without consequences and where the victims are punished for speaking out. You wouldn't want to slay the good reputation of the family would you? Better a good-looking façade with a rotten core, then a bruised façade with a clean core where abusers are not tolerated. Better to punish those pointing at the rotten core than those who are making it rotten. It's easier that way (also it doesn't rock the boat, it doesn't trouble the unjust/immoral and superficial "peace"). At least to those ready to damn their soul to avoid facing reality. And in the case of Josephine, everyone around her damn themselves in some way. Her family, the village, the church and specific individuals related to all of these groups. Which relates to another problematic dimension of all this. If someone points out at the rotten

[35] Athalie is another good example.

core in their family to expunge it and that family, instead of being supported by the larger community, is then exiled or shunned, well, that creates an incentive to not do the moral thing.

One day, Josephine is sexually assaulted and becomes pregnant. At the end of the book, she is about to go get an abortion when she has a climactic discussion with the Chamberian stand-in, the man she has fallen in love with after moving to the big city. The man she loves is the writer of a play which gives the book its name[36] and whose second act is said to be devilish. Interestingly enough, considering that Chambers was in many ways a reactionary, the character of Josephine is never judged for having planned to get an abortion. And neither is a friend of hers who has already gotten one and who is shown to be perhaps the most morally upright character in the whole book. In fact, the male hero of The Fifth Horseman is OK with Josephine getting an abortion… unless she wants the baby.

Because if she does, he wants to raise the child with her. Something similar also happens in Gitana, another book written around the same time. And for readers of TKiY, this might remind you of The Street of the First Shell. A story which ends with a character called Sylvia being reunited with her child and her lover, who is not the child's father. In fact, there are quite a few adoptive fathers in Chambers' work and they always make it clear that they consider their adoptive daughters to be their daughters as much as if they were the biological dads. Like in Ashes of Empire where the main couple basically adopts a young girl called Little Red Riding Hood. And it's always a daughter. And while the daughter is often associated with red, blue seems associated with yearning and absence. Saudade as the Portuguese say. And how about Athalie? Chambers himself claims she's his favorite character. Well, Athalie sees dead people. And that includes children that weren't born but would have been if worldly conditions had made it possible. She even sees the potential children of the people who couldn't be together but who were meant to be together. Which reminds me of something in The Fifth Horseman: *"So it's rather odd I should miss what never existed."* Is he talking about his Athalie? A child who died before her time? Athalie, who was called Red Riding Hood as a child in the book that wears her name. Athalie, whose name reappears in 1927 in The Drums of Alone. In that book, her full name is Athalie d'Auris, Baroness of Elven. Athalie Elven. That's 25 years after the last mention of an Elven. And Athalie Elven is constantly described in terms that highlight her lifelessness and a childish aspect to her (even though she is no longer a child). In fact she is often described as resembling a doll filled with sawdust[37]. She is also constantly associated with water (and even snow imagery[38]) and her mouth is constantly emphasized as looking like an "O" (it's literally written like that). You know, like a doll. Which reminds me of this passage that concerns the couple who is met by the Phantom of the Past in The Younger Set :

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[36] If I remember correctly, aside from TKiY and The Fifth Horseman, the only other book whose name is the same as a fictional play within the book is The Painted Minx. Speaking of which, the story of The Painted Minx, the play, reflects the story of The Painted Minx, the novel. As above, so below.

[37] "Ah, ma cousine, delicate doll of porcelain, I know you are not stuffed with sawdust! I know that your beguiling mind is wise with the ancient wisdom of the Nile... ."

[38] Considering Chambers' love for slightly off mirroring, I wonder if the fact that Neves is Portuguese for snow is relevant. Probably not. But this footnote will make more sense when we get to The Snows of Yesteryears and numbered entries.

Contented, she turned to her doll again, undressing it deftly, tenderly. "At moments," she said, "I have an odd idea that it is real. I am not quite sure even now. Do you believe it is alive, Phil? Perhaps, at night, when I am asleep, it becomes alive…. This morning I awoke, laughing, laughing in delight—thinking I heard you laughing, too—as once—In the dusk where there were many roses and many stars—big stars, and very, very bright—I saw you—saw you—and the roses[—]Yes; and there were roses. But I was never there."

I've got one last thing to share with you for this so-called biographical section. There are a lot of girls of French, French-Canadian or Irish origin who have abusive families and who get fairy tale endings in Chambers' work. But before this gets any longer or any darker, I'll end this sort of portrait of Chambers and his loved ones with two excerpts from The Case of Mr. Helmer. The context here is that the titular Mr. Helmer is dying from fever and he is visited by a supernatural apparition, a woman he once knew:

"You were very young," she said under her breath—" and I was younger—and the rains had swollen the Canadian river so that it boiled amber at the fords; and I could not cross—alas!" A moment of stunning silence, then her voice again: "I said nothing, not a word even of thanks when you offered aid… . I—was not too heavy in your arms, and the ford was soon passed—soon passed. That was very long ago."

And later :

"Listen! do you hear my mother calling me? It is too late; but she was with me to the end." Through the silence, from an
infinite distance, came a desolate cry of grief—"Françoise!"

Which reminds me of the last of the Maids of Paradise to be introduced in the novel of the same name: Jacqueline. She appears alongside a rich, extremely moral yet deluded Countess and a morally complex fiery woman who hides behind the name of Sylvia Elven[39]. Jacqueline is herself nicknamed the Flying Mermaid of Ker-Ys and she has almost supernatural swimming abilities. At one point she survives a situation that should have drowned any living person. It involves her jumping off a cliff into the sea. Actually, just three more quotes. This time from The Throw-Back:

"Driftwood is of the sea; from her it comes, to her it returns. The green-haired Ocean Goddess may tire of her plaything for a time and toss it carelessly upon the beach, where it lies for years while the shifting sands cover it and the shell-cased creatures of the sea upon its surface die and crumble into lime-flecked dust. But, in the end, the sea remembers and comes again in storm and hurricane. She stretches her foam-white arms; the sands dissolve; and she takes again what she has cast away. For the sea never really gives up anything, not even her dead, and they who go down to the sea in ships must be listed, like driftwood, to the credit of the sea"

"Behind the unshaven mask that was his face, strange emotions were passing, emotions that he could not understand, would not understand unless he had translated the message of the

[39] Although her real name is Sylvenne Duhamel, it is implied that she's actually from Elven, strangely enough.

wavelets as they slapped against the piling beneath his feet. “We have been calling,” they whispered, “calling, calling for five hundred years. You are ours and we claim our own at last.”

“For the sea had claimed her own; the jealous sea that never gives up anything, not even her dead.”

[Unmasked in Broadalbin] There Is Something Here, Isn’t There?

Chambers wrote the following in The Common Law : *“Nothing that amounts to anything in art is ever done accidentally or merely because the person who creates it loves to do it.”* And he once claimed in an interview : *“‘[I do] [o]nly what I can do, [...] not what I would like to do.”*

And he also wrote this passage from the novel The Fighting Chance which has been burning inside my brain ever since I’ve read it :

“I don't believe I do [know what I mean], either. There are intervals in my career which might prove eloquent if I opened my lips. But I don't, except to make floating rings and cabalistic signs out of cigarette smoke. Can you read their meaning? Look! There goes one, and there's another, and another—all twisting and uncurling into hieroglyphics. They are very significant; they might tell you a lot of things, if you would only translate them. But you haven't the key—have you?”

Reading this passage was like hearing a gunshot in the night. What the hell does this have to do with anything that’s happening in that scene? Why did Chambers choose to not only interrupt that conversation right after that line is said, but also to have the focus of the scene be redirected elsewhere. But the real question is when do magicians redirect your attention? When they perform their tricks. Like the magician hero from Chambers' Green Mouse[40]. But you might be thinking, aren’t you making a lot out of what’s essentially a verbose and poetic way of expressing: “I don’t even know what I’m saying”? That’s also what I told myself at first. Then similar gunshots kept happening for 80-odd books. A slight exaggeration, I admit. But at some point you read so many of these kinds of passages that they no longer feel like they’re a writer having fun with language; they feel like a writer telling you he’s hiding something inside his work. Especially when those passages are combined with snarky comments about the public and critics being too dumb to know what’s good or to know where they should look. Especially when they concern characters who are often so very much like Chambers himself (in terms of job, schooling, Latin Quarter experience, interests, et cetera) and who say things like *“I am the author”* and *“I’m talking like an autobiography”*.

[40] Who seemingly shares a lot of characteristics with Chambers and who himself lives through a moment of crisis; one where he realizes that he has spent his youth dabbling about and that he’s waking up in his late-early adulthood with no marketable skills to speak off. He then decides to become a magician (the parlor-trick kind of magician) and later, an inventor. There are actually a few such characters, meaning high-society parlor-tricksters who feel very ambivalent about holding such positions (like in The Streets of Ascalon and Japonette).

And at some point when an author makes weird remarks about buried secrets, hidden messages and their keys, forgotten identities, ciphers and encoded information, musings about the place of the artist in his own work, alchemy, Rosicrucianism[41], esotericism (as in stuff like alchemy, Freemasonry[42] and Hermeticism[43]) for almost 40 years (in books ostentatiously not about any of those things, no less), you start to feel like you should be listening. And when that author's work is full of a personal stock company of recurring commedia dell'arte type characters partly based on real people, lost mythical places and people with the names of places, the same ever repeating traumas, familial wounds, fractured selves (and the process of integration), specific color-coded cluster of themes and things, correspondences between the microcosm and the macrocosm[44], mirroring structures, Carnivals, masks and unmaskings, conspiracy adjacent thinking (Slayer of Souls reads like a QAnon power-fantasy at certain points), recurring phonetic and etymological concerns (and an absurd love for near-homophones, sometimes across language barriers) and archetypes related to those, well, you start to get swept in. And why didn't he make any of this clear? Well, when someone takes every chance they get, over a period of almost 40 years, to include bitter rants about critics/the public in their novels, that feels like deeply held resentment that might have had an impact on that point. And if you consider the more personal aspects of it, then that might explain it further[45]. Anyway, let's try to swim against the tide a little longer.

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[41] From The Firing Line: "I forgot to leave a key for him under the yellow rose—" / "Under the rose—and yellow at that! The mysteries of the Rosicrucians pale into insignificance beside the lurid rites of Mr. Malcourt and Mr. Hamil—under the yellow rose! Proceed, my fearsome adept, and perform the occult deed!" From The Adventures of a Modest Man: "Why should I not forget you? Are you historical, are you antique, are you rococo, are you a Rosacrucian?" (One wonders if the misspelling is intentional.) There is also a Café Rose-Croix in Enter the Queen and a place called Rose-Cross in Iole. And there is "the Keys of Life and Death hanging on the Rosy Cross" in Eris (and the Rosicrucians themselves are mentioned). Worth noting how the spelling is always a bit different. Also, Cagliostro, a controversial but central figure to Rosicrucianism, is mentioned in Japonette ("I know what you are," he said. / "Do you? I don't. Reveal me to myself, O Cagliostro!") and The Eggs of the Silver Moon (Police!!!). This is not meant to be an exhaustive list and I haven't even highlighted less obvious references/imagery.

[42] Here are two curious examples. From The Hidden Children: "You are not a Mason, Loskiel. And Lana has just given the Masonic signal of distress—having seen me give it in a dream. It is odd." And from The Fighting Chance: "for as yet that freemasonry evoked no recognition from the pallid man opposite, whose hands were steady as though that morning's sun had wakened him from pleasant dreams."

[43] The author William Sharp/Fiona Macleod was one of Chambers' earliest champions and William/Fiona was, at one point, a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Iole contains a reference to W. B. Yeats (who was also in the HOotGD) and to a "Fiona" (in the same passage). It might not mean much but still, keep that in mind when we get to The Talkers (which are mentioned in Iole) and some of the esoteric resonances. I wish I could make an expert on last century occultism read that book. I'd love to know what they'd think of Casimir Sadoul and Dr. Pockman.

[44] I've mostly noticed the microcosm and macrocosm thing playing out in terms of structure but in The Laughing Girl, an explicit parallel is drawn between the Pleiades star-cluster and the Cyclades, an island group which is central to the plot of that novel. The Cardigan series does a lot of that too. In The Maids-At-Arms the Pleiades are called the "dancers in the sky" and one is said to have fallen and to be submerged under water. The Pleiades also feature in The Hidden Children where certain of those stars represent a "witch-wolf", a "yellow moth", an "enchanted bear", a "white cross" and a "nighthawk".

[45] I don't get into details about it here, but it might also involve family secrets. Possibly about his brother.

[Alone in Carcosa/Ker-Is] What Le Foyer Breton and The Drums of Aulone Reveal

Let me tell you about Ker-Is/Ker-Ys or simply Is-Ys (all four variants appear in Chambers' work). To make a long story very short, Ker-Is is the Breton Atlantis. A mythical lost city which was submerged under the sea. Obviously Chambers knew of it because the ethereal Breton princess from The Demoiselle d'Ys is called Jeanne d'Ys. Jeanne from Ys. Not to mention that Ker-Is is directly referred to several times in Chambers' work (in TKiY, Ashes of Empire, The Maids of Paradise and L'Ombre). Well, the legend of Ker-Is can actually tell us quite a bit about Chambers' mythical and mysterious Carcosa. The legend in general but also a specific version of the legend, the one that appears in Le foyer breton. But can we be sure that Chambers knew of this specific version? Sure, because he reused one of Souvestre's Breton guide side-characters called Goulven in The Demoiselle d'Ys (same name, same nationality, same role). Anything else?

Like I said earlier, Rick Lai is the one who identified Le foyer breton as being an influence on Chambers. But why did he think that? Because there is a Man in Purple Tatters in Chambers' work (including in The Silent Land, a story which mentions Carcosa) and a Man in Velvet Tatters in La Souris de Terre et le Corbeau Gris, one of the stories in Le foyer breton. And of course, velvet is often purple (especially royal velvet). But who's the Man in Purple/Velvet Tatters? One of the numerous incarnations of death that appears in Le foyer. In Breton folklore, death is called the Ankou and although he can take many forms, he usually appears as a man or skeleton with a concealed face. Sometimes he's just a shadow. Mr. Lai also identifies the Yellow Lady from the story Peronik l'Idiot as being of interest. Who is she? A personification of an infectious plague who accompanies a lunatic in his deluded quest to become as rich and powerful as a king. Interesting but is that it? Well, French being my mother tongue, I decided to read Le foyer breton and, oh boy, there is a lot in there. You've got a mention of the very small and obscure town of Elven, so already that's kind of a bingo. There's also a white lodge[46], a musician named Lao who is associated with the moon and a fantastical city peopled by fantastical creatures (like Yu-Lao from The Maker of Moons; and to be more precise, the fantastical creatures are korrigans, aka creatures that are known for being counterfeiters of gold and TMoM is about counterfeiters of gold), there are a ton of omen-birds (figures which recur in Chambers' work; the Spirit-Bird from The Silent Land being perhaps the most prominent), there are werewolves (same), a very evocative passage where someone gets lost in a sort of fairyland of their own imagination, a constant stream of souls in perdition, basically all the names of

[46] Like in Lorraine: "He told her, too, of the Isantee, and the legends of the gray gull, of Harpan and Chaské, and the white lodge of hope". The white lodge story (L'Auberge blanche) from Le Foyer breton is not included in all editions of Le Foyer breton because it's apparently not a canonical bit of Breton folklore. While it's obvious from the context in Lorraine that the white lodge there is associated with the tradition of the Santee Dakota, as it will become clear, Chambers' really liked the principle of "two birds/allusions, one stone/reference". So I'd wager he was at the very least a bit tickled by the presence of a supernaturally-touched "auberge blanche" in Le foyer breton. Especially since the "storytelling" passage of Lorraine echoes other similar passages, which we'll explore later, and which usually connect with Breton folklore. In fact, gray gulls are mentioned in The Messenger and The Maids of Paradise, "Kay-óshk, the gray gull" appears in a story which directly "interferes" with the events of The White Shadow (it literally reads like the story bleeds into it for a moment), which takes place in Brittany, and there is a conspicuously named Grey Gull Island in The Little Misery (whose relation with Brittany will eventually sort of make sense).

places in Brittany that Chambers uses, mentions of the crusaders (that's also a long story), good old Hermes[47], a mention of a devil for those who fall asleep in church (The Court of the Dragon, anyone?) and a night-time procession/parade/revelry of supernatural entities that includes the aforementioned werewolves, aka the Breton loup-garou. Oh, and there are a few characters with queenly attitudes/attributes that are associated with the color green (some are supernatural entities, some are human). One of the human ones is a fiery peasant girl who is promised *"a robe of earth and grass made by God himself ; a palace such as no living being has ever lived in, and the fate meant for the greatest of queens."*

What about Ker-Is? What is it about? Well, whichever version of the legend you read about, it usually boils down to a sinful princess, Dahut, and a sinful city being punished for their sins by being engulfed by the sea. The story ends with the King of Ys, King Gradlon, making his escape on horseback after being warned of the incoming catastrophe by St-Corentin or St. Gwénnolé. The particulars change from version to version but usually Gradlon tries to take his sinful daughter, the princess Dahut, with him. Or at least, she tries to flee with him. Unfortunately for the princess, it always ends with Dahut falling from the horse (like Castaigne? Does falling a horse signifies hitting rock bottom? The moment when clarity can be achieved… or failed to be achieved. Life without illusions or a deluded life?) into the deep waters of Ker-Is. Sometimes, Gradlon is the one who throws her from the horse. And in some versions of the stories, she both dies and doesn't die; she transforms into something else. Which is fitting enough because this princess is also known by another name, Ahès. In a sense, Dahut becomes Ahès after she drowns/transforms and becomes a mermaid or mermaid-type creature. So far, some Carcosa-esque vibe maybe, but not much else. I mean, we know that Chambers was aware of the legend and probably that he liked the Édouard Lalo opera called The King of Ys (he's named-dropped in Enter the Queen; a character called Sara Lalo, a model with an abusive father, is mentioned in The Red Republic; a Sara, the red-haired/green-eyed Queen of the Latin Quarter, is one of the central characters of Another Good Man and that story also includes a vague mention of a Lalou), but so far the parallels aren't mindblowing. But let's dig into the version that's in Le foyer breton. Well, for starters it's the only one I know of which has a *"magical mask"/"enchanted mask"* at its center (granted I'm no Ker-Is scholar, maybe this is appears elsewhere too). The mask doesn't do much but its very presence is already more in line with what little we know of the tragedy of Carcosa. Meaning that the tragedy of Carcosa features an entity called The Stranger who everyone believes is masked and who reveals that he is not; to the horror of everyone, especially Cassilda who emits a desperate cry during the unmasking. (And also that it involves another mysterious entity called the Pallid Mask.)

Well, in Le foyer breton's versions of the Ker-Is story[48], there is a stranger who comes to town. We are told that Ker-Is is a city of sin where the populace wastes away through fancy dances and spectacles. Dahut throws lavish decadent parties and princes from all around the country are drawn to this court of renown like moths to the flame. Meanwhile King Gradlon/Grallon lives alone in one of the abandoned wings of his palace, brooding. One might extrapolate a growing madness. (In any case, Chambers associates brooding with delusions; Walter Butler being a

[47] Brittany's favorite pagan god according to Le Foyer breton.
[48] Souvestre wrote it "Keris/Kéris".

very explicit example.) As for his palace, it is said to be covered with a metal which looks like gold but which isn't gold (made by our favorite counterfeiters, the korrigans). Oh, and there are also mentions of magical creatures like the aforementioned korrigans and water dragons (btw, the etymology of dragon is kind of linked to that of worms and serpent; especially through the Old English "wyrm").

Anyway, at some point our stranger, a *"powerful prince"* who has come *"from the edge of the world"*, is introduced to Dahut during one of her famous celebrations. And although he does not wear yellow, the stranger is dressed entirely in red, which might remind you of Edgar Allan Poe's The Masque of the Red Death. One oft-cited influences on The King in Yellow. In fact, the excerpt from The King in Yellow play that is about The Stranger and the unmasking is very clearly patterned on the climatic reveal of The Masque of the Red Death. Also, red and yellow are often paired together in Chambers' work. (For your information, the only drawing he made for one of his own books, the Winged Figure he drew for one version of TKiY's cover, is robed in yellow and has red wings.) The stranger is described as having a beard so bushy that you can't see his face. All that you can see are his eyes which are said to be *"shining like stars*[49]*"*. No face, only eyes. And although this is not exactly the rarest of expressions, it's worth noting that Chambers sometimes described characters as having *"two black stars for eyes*[50]*"* or as having eyes like *"the splendour of dark stars*[51]*"*. Like the black stars of Carcosa, perhaps? Also, do you know who else has no face and only eyes in the work of Chambers? The Breton loup-garou (they don't have bushy beards though).

In Chambers' fiction (what follows is taken from L'Ombre, a variation on The Demoiselle d'Ys story that also takes place in Brittany), it is said that the loup-garou *"has only eyes; no mouth, no teeth, no nostrils, and no hair"*. It is said that the loup-garou has *"the shape of a man with no features except two enormous eyes"*. These werewolves are in fact *"[s]pectres [who flit] to and fro", they are "grey shapes without faces—things with eyes"*, they are *"ghastly shapes [who have] no faces, only eyes"*. And of course, they cast no shadows. I mean, because shadows don't have shadows. And as we learn in The Talkers, damned souls cast no shadows either. We find many such grey shapes associated with death in Chambers but interestingly enough, those grey shapes aren't always associated with death. Sometimes they are associated with life without illusions. See the ending of The Progress of Janet which goes like this : *"Dear," he said in a low voice, "have you any regrets?" She slowly lifted her clear, young eyes to her lover,*

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[49] Chambers used the exact same expression in The Red Republic to describe Jeanne's eyes.
[50] From The Reckoning.
[51] From Owl's Head which is a story from The Better Man (the titular story also makes note of starry eyes which are "like the eyes of children"). There are also eyes like stars (often made starry because of tears) in In the Quarter, The Fighting Chance, The Adventures of a Modest Man, The Purple Emperor, Another Good Man ("eyes like stars above her veil"), The Third Eye (Police!!!), The Tree of Dreams (The Tree of Heaven), The Moonlit Way, Who Goes There!, Anne's Bridge, The Hidden Children, The Laughing Girl, The Girl Philippa, Athalie, One Man in a Million (A Young Man in a Hurry), et cetera. And there is this passage from The Little Red Foot: "Her eyes had the starry look of a child's—or of unshed tears." And this one from The Fire-Bird: "her eyes all starry with unshed tears". One is almost tempted to interpret the "twin suns sink[ing] behind the lake" of Cassilda's Song as eyes whose tears are drying. Or perhaps eyes which are glazing over, if you will. Like all those characters in Chambers' work who sport a lost, far-away look when the phantoms of the past are submerging them. Or when their brooding delusions overtake them. And there's this heartbreaking line from The Firing Line: "Malcourt's face had become drawn, sallow, almost sneering; but in the slow gaze he turned on Hamil was that blank hopelessness which no man can encounter and remember unmoved."

shook her head, looked out around her at the real world, undaunted, and saw the grim, grey shape of life gazing at her, unmasked."

Death or life without illusion. The Stranger or The Phantom of Truth. But I'm jumping the gun. Let's go back to Ker-Is. This *"bearded prince"*, as he is also called, reveals himself to be greatly charismatic and his speech entrances the crowds; Dahut and the people of the court accept him as their master. He then makes everyone dance madly with the help of a goatskin-wearing dwarf who plays the biniou. Ultimately, the stranger reveals his true identity, that of a Satanic figure. Figuratively speaking, he unmasks and drops his disguise. Of course, he can't actually unmask because he's not wearing a mask. Like The Stranger in the Carcosa story. Probably rather horrified by the revelation, Dahut and the Ker-Is decadent nobility can't do anything to avert disaster because the stranger stole the key of the dikes and has opened said dikes. The so-far pretty useless King, the good Gradlon, is warned by St-Corentin, flees and sacrifices his daughter to the sea to save himself (well, she does literally murder people for fun, so it's not an unwarranted sacrifice).

In his version, Souvestre notes that Dahut gained the nickname of Ahès through the shortening of her original nickname which is Alc'huèz[52]; meaning key/solution/clue/means of access. Souvestre has a footnote that says that whether wrong or right, these etymologies are *"accepted in Brittany[53]"*. Ahès is called that (although Souvestre mostly refers to her as Dahut) because she always wears the silver keys that can open the dikes of Ker-Is around her neck. After Dahut drowns, Corentin "officially" changes her name to Ahès and he gives the chasm where she died the name of *"the chasm of Ahès"* (The Lake of Hali?). The story with Gradlon contemplating the space where the city of Ker-Is used to be. Lost Ker-Is. So the black waters of Ys, those waters of transformation. Do they remind you of anything? Maybe the Lake of Hali, maybe the titular black water from The Black Water, a story of transformation. Chambers loved stories of transformations. And he also loved alchemy. And what's at the center of alchemical lore? The philosopher's stone. Which is actually not a stone but rather often depicted as a liquid, a tincture, a powder or an elixir. Waters of transformation. And what does Chambers say of the philosopher's stone? In The Girl Philippa he writes : *"Sorrow is the philosopher's stone.... Else we remain only children until we die."*

In Chambers' work, when people who are confronted by great sorrow and great pains, they either feel a) an inner conflagration or b) an inner drowning. This is what changes them, makes them divided selves. Some try to forget, like Scarlett in The Maids of Paradise:

"Is there no hope?" she asked, quietly.
"None for the man who was. Much for James Scarlett, tamer of lions and general mountebank," I said, laughing down the rising tide of bitterness. Why had she stirred those dark waters? I had drowned myself in them long since. Under them lay the corpse of a man I had forgotten—my dead self.
"No hope?" she repeated.

[52] Another footnote claims that the city Ker-Ahès is named after Ahès/Dahut.
[53] He also writes about the etymology of Paris which supposedly means "equal to Is".

Suddenly the ghost of all I had lost rose before me with her words—rose at last after all these years, towering, terrible, free once more to fill the days with loathing and my nights with hell eternal,... after all these years! Overwhelmed, I fought down the spectre in silence. Kith and kin were not all in the world; love of woman was not all; a chance for a home, a wife, children, were not all; a name was not all. Raising my head, a trifle faint with the struggle and the cost of the struggle, I saw the distress in her eyes and strove to smile.

The flame that was Scarlett has been extinguished. At least momentarily[54]. Metaphorically speaking, Scarlett has drunk the nepenthe. Other characters do so both metaphorically and explicitly. Or at least, explicitly in the sense that Chambers likens alcohol to the nepenthe. Here's a passage that concerns the nepenthe in The Restless Sex and that puts it in opposition to the philosopher's stone:

The hopeless part of it was that, unlike weaker men, he had no desire to drown sorrow in any irregular and unworthy fashion. Many men of many minds turn to many things seeking the anodyne in one form or another—the nepenthe of forgetfulness, rarer than the philosopher's stone.

In Chambers, those who have suffered greatly either become fiery hungry ghosts, people who can never get/do enough (and who weave vast phantoms in their minds; which they superimpose upon reality), or the retreat into themselves and try to shut-out the outside. Both feel disconnected from their real-self (and reality). Some of those characters become villains, other heroes. But the heroes always have to do the work of inner change and inner reconciliation. And they also have to either open up to the world and accept vulnerability/connection/imperfection again or become kinder/more empathic people. Sometimes it's kind of both. Actually, pain and sorrow are not the only ingredients that can lead to a drowning and a conflagration. Hate and love can also bring one there. Here's from The Hidden Children :

"In every one of us," said I, "there is an element which, when it meets its fellow in another, unites with it, turning instantly to fire and burning to the very soul."
"How wise have you become in alchemy and metaphysics!" she exclaimed in mock admiration.
"Oh, I am not wise in anything, and you know it, Lana."
"I don't know it. You've been wise enough to keep clear of me, if that be truly wisdom. Come, Euan, what do you think? Do you and I contain these fellow elements, that you seem to dread our mutual conflagration if you kiss me?"

But now I have to tell you about another book which is more important than anything else when it comes to Carcosa. I'm talking about The Drums of Aulone which was released in 1927. That's six years before Chambers' death. In a sense, that novel is old man Chambers telling us: "You know what? Screw this, here's the story of Carcosa in the historical fiction mode." But you kind of need a lot of context to see that (including knowing about Le foyer breton). Since I just gave you part of that context, I guess this is as good a time as any to get into The Drums of Aulone.

[54] And as Walter Butler notes in The Reckoning: "Time's alchemy".

That said, if, like me, you enjoy your Carcosa dim and lost and feel ambivalent about shining too much light on it, don't worry, Chambers is the type of author who likes for things to echo in several directions at once. There is not one solution to Carcosa and there is not just one reading of what Carcosa is or means. After a one year deep dive, I can assure you, nothing about this has been de-enchanted for me. The enchantment is stronger than ever and Carcosa feels farther away than it has ever been. Carcosa is nothing if not a mystery wrapped in more mystery and it's not because a layer of it is a bit more "standard" that all of it is. I thought it worth noting as the following might momentarily make this all sound a bit too down-to-earth for some people's tastes.

The Drums of Aulone, or The Fear of God as it was known during its serialization (*"It's a fearful thing to fall in the hand of the living god"*, anyone?), starts on the lands of the titular family of Aulone. In fact, it starts with Hastur and Piriou Louis leading a hunt. Those are characters from The Demoiselle d'Ys which is, again, the fifth story of TKiY. So, what's The Drums of Aulone about? It's about the Aulone family. A family which is really a father and daughter duo. You've got the eccentric king-like figure and his only daughter, Michelle, a fiery princess-like character who has red-haired and who is heavily associated with nature[55]. As for the lands they rule over, they are Aulone itself and Maniscamp-sur-l'Ombre. L'Ombre, or the Shadow, being a river which we come across very early on in the book. It's also important to know that there appears only one other capitalized Ombre in all of Chambers' 87 books. It's not a river (it's a fish) but it appears in a story which is itself called L'Ombre. And, well, L'Ombre concerns the supernatural, death-coded werewolves, the stopping of time and dark waters. Anyway, the lands that belong to the Aulone family are heavily associated with water themselves and the family itself is described as being fond of bathing. Oh and side note, the book also briefly mentions Brittany and features a character whose title is Elven. You know, like the most Brittany-linked character in all of Chambers, Sylvia Elven. But what is the motivating incident in The Drums of Aulone?

Well, it just so happens that father and daughter are invited to one of the Sun King[56]'s decadent parties in Versailles. In Versailles Michelle is confronted by a stranger, the Sun King's right hand man. A man who is described as having seemingly always been there. Curiously enough, no one knows how he came to hold such a prominent position as he is not connected to any prominent families. He's called Gribouri. The word means ghost or spirit, more precisely a spirit which has come back from the dead to speak to, exchange with or haunt the living. Gribouri is a stranger who brings doom to the Aulone family[57]. Perhaps this reminds you of a character called The Stranger who brings doom to Cassilda and Camilla during a fateful unmasking? Well, Gribouri doesn't unmask in Versailles, well, he kind of does figuratively speaking, but he also

[55] And who at one point becomes a "Demoiselle d'atours" for her cousin.
[56] The Sun King being Louis the 14th. I'm not just calling him that as to create an association between him and another yellow-coded king in your mind, that's just what Chambers calls him most of the time.
[57] Despite being a Machiavellian who seemingly cares for nothing but power, Gribouri's "love" for Michelle also transforms him. Love has struck him through "the depths where hides [his] soul". Out of the Depths as one might say. One being Chambers in this case since he rather liked to reuse that expression. Enough to call one of his stories that and to give that name to the first novel of the Chambersian stand-in from The Restless Sex (and where the expression is reused at a climactic moment). See also the excerpt about Malcourt about the surface/depth of his being (one of the first things he says in TFL is "Go in deep?"; he then adds that he didn't mean the actual water that Hamil was swimming in).

literally unmasks in a later crucial scene. So Gribouri is here to tell Michelle about the danger that she and her father face and he does so next in a garden in which we find a fountain that has a name whose etymology is linked to nepenthe. The yellow-coded imagery in Versailles is enough to make one's eyes pop and everything there is very dreamlike. In fact, the place is actually compared to a fairly-land and dragons are invoked. There is also a conspicuous and insistent mention of an œil-de-bœuf, aka an oculus or a bull's eye. And considering that Aldebaran and the Hyades are part of the Taurus constellation, I think that's Chambers winking in that direction. And if you think that's too much of a stretch, well, Chambers does link actual bulls, as in the farm animals, to Aldebaran in his 1922 novel, Eris:

So the great herd-bull, like all "Former Things," was doomed to "pass away." As the Dionysia became the Mithraic Rites, so was taurian glory doomed to pass.... A bullet where Aldebaran shows the way. The way of all bulls. Neither Odell nor Eris had ever heard of Aldebaran. And the tombs of the Magi were no more tightly sealed than the mind of the father. But the child's mind hid a little lamp unlighted. A whisper might reveal to her Aldebaran shining in the midnight heavens. Or the Keys of Life and Death hanging on the Rosy Cross....

The bull died at the appointed hour. Eris stood in her bed-room closing both ears with trembling palms. She did not hear the shot. Mazie found her there; laughed at her good-naturedly. Eris' lips formed the words: "Is he dead?" "My dear, he's Polack beef by now." Gloria tauri—gloria mundi. But whatever ends always begins again. What was the Dionysia is now Rosicrucian ... and shall again be something else ... and always the same. As for the Bull of Mithra—and Mithra, too—bull-calves are born every day. And there are a million million suns in the making. It's only the Old Order that changes, not what orders it.

And that's definitively not the only time the Rosicrucians are conspicuously invoked by Chambers. Anyway, the Aulone family has a falling out with the Sun King. By the way, Chambers once wrote a story called The Silent Land in 1896. That's his only story outside of TKiY to mention Carcosa. In it, it is said that the King of Carcosa utters great things and blasphemies. In The Drums of Aulone, the lord of Aulone commits a blasphemous act and says blasphemous things to the Sun King's face. The King being, of course, God's appointed one. This enrages the King who makes the Aulone enemies of the court. Oh yeah, and the Aulone family are literal blasphemers or heretics on account of being Huguenots-sympathizers. (Dangerous banned books, of the Huguenots variety, are relevant to both The Sun Hawk and The Drums of Aulone.) In fact, part of The Drums of Aulone is about the persecution of the Huguenots. So having become persona non grata, father and daughter escape by horse and ride towards bodies of water. That said, unlike Gradlon and Dahut, they don't ride the same horse and nobody falls in the black waters. But one thing is certain, the Aulone lose their lands to the King who takes possession of them. Aulone is taken over by Versailles. (And not long before that happens, the heroine mentions an armour made in Augsburg and worn by Mars[58]). If

[58] I mention this because while I've mostly read The Drums of Aulone with my own eyes, I've listened to a part of it via a TTS app and it just so happened to include that bit. Honestly, I could have sworn that it said Hawberk (like the armourer in TKiY) and I was extremely surprised to see that the word in question was Augsburg when I went back to check. It doesn't actually sound all that much like it but still, maybe it's relevant. After all, Jacqueline Nevers and her father are in the business of antique armours (amongst other things).

you've read TKiY, you might remember that Carcosa is not the only fantastical place which is mentioned. There is also a rather mysterious line that mentions Yhtill. It goes like this: *"The scolloped tatters of the King in Yellow must hide Yhtill forever"*. What I'm about to say will probably sound silly but eventually, when you know more about how Chambers operate, it will make sense. Actually, just a moment before I tell you. In the series Twin Peaks[59], there is a mysterious entity who says the following line: *"I mean it like it is... like it sounds."* Believe me, that could be one of Chambers' slogans. And I'd add another slogan, a take on that first aforementioned line, one that goes like this: "I mean it like it is... like it looks." And, well, the letter "Y" is like a straight line with a "v" on top. This might sound silly, but you have to remember that one of several concepts introduced in TKiY is the "mystery of the Hyades". And what is the Hyades cluster said to be shaped like? Like a "v", like the v-shaped figure on the neck of the viper in The Demoiselle d'Ys (or the "arrow-shaped mark on the forehead" from The Messenger; an arrow being y-shaped), like a few other interesting v-shapes in Chambers' work (also arrow-shapes. And if you connect the "v" cluster to Aldebaran with a straight line, well, you get a "Y" figure. Again, I know this sounds silly but Chambers loved clusters of names and sometimes those clusters sound alike and sometimes they look alike. Plus in Edmund Spenser's immortal classic of the English language, the one and only The Faerie Queene, a book which I have a feeling was an inspiration on Robert W. Chambers, there is a character who represents falsehood who wears a literal false… hood. Sometimes it's like that.

But back to the story of The Drums of Aulone. At some point, Michelle is joined by her cousin, Athalie d'Auris, Baroness of Elven. The first Elven we meet after a 25 year gap. The character of Athalie is associated with water-lilies, water imagery in general and also snow imagery. In fact, she has a mouth shaped like an "O". A fact which is emphasized over and over again. And you know what? In French, the letter "O" sounds like the word "eau", meaning water. And we also find strong "O" sounds in Auris and Aulone. (And of course, the "iss" sound is in Ker-Is.) Another fact which is emphasized again and again about Athalie is her lifelessness. She is constantly compared to a doll. In almost every way, Athalie is the polar "opposite" of Michelle. Like a certain Jeanne d'Ys, aka Jeanne from the submerged city of Ys, is the polar opposite (at least symbolically) of Jeanne-la-flamme, aka Jeanne the flame, an historical person who fought in the war of the Two Joans. I say that because both characters are mentioned in The Demoiselle d'Ys. In fact, this dynamic might be a reflection of the dynamic between Cassilda and Camilla, two of the characters from The King in Yellow play. Why do I say that? Because there are two Cassildas in Chambers' work, as well as two Camillas. The first Cassilda is the one from TKiY and the second Cassilda is from The Girl Philippa. But in The Girl Philippa, Cassilda is actually St-Cassilda, a church. Why is that relevant because the church ends up burning and because of the following line: *"Cassilda the beautiful was merely a hollow shell within which raged a sea of fire"*. That line is so close to how Michelle's inner turmoil is described in The Drums of Aulone[60] that anyone who has read that novel, would be fooled if I

[59] I wrote a little something about the peculiar resonances which exist between Twin Peaks and Chambers' writings and one day I'd like to expand on that text. For now, let's just say that Lynch an Frost's series is weirdly relevant to all this.

[60] Here are a few examples: "raging confusion swept me, wave after wave"; "I know you, Michelle, who have set your cheeks and lips blazing and fired every red drop of blood in your body with a single kiss!" / The infamy of this young man so enraged me that the violence of my wrath left me mute."; "it rushed over me in an access [sic] of mingled rage

replaced the name Cassilda with Michelle and told them that this line came from The Drums of Aulone. Even if they had just read it. Michelle's inner conflagration is the core of her emotional experience and it is brought up again and again. People who are in danger of perdition often feel an inner conflagration in Chambers' work[61]. And more importantly, the Church of St-Cassilda is located in a town called Ausone[62]. Funny also, that there is a lot of letter switching in Chambers, like in Eris when the titular heroine tells her lover to switch the "i" in her name with "o". Here's the excerpt in question:

"I am not really welcome; I am pleasantly endured. My people have nothing in common with me. It always has been so. I seem to have been born an outsider. I still am. They can't help it; nor can I. There seems to be no bond, no tie, no natural obligation of blood, none of custom, to hold me here.... It is a lonely feeling. But it has been mine from earliest recollection.
"Often I used to wonder why I had no intimate affection for this house, for the place—trees, hills, woods.
"I love them—but as one who passes that way often, and becomes fond of a neighbour's house and trees.
"Never have they, in any intimate sense, been mine, or part of me.... Not even my old dresses, my few books, my fewer child's toys, have I ever truly considered mine—lacking, perhaps, the love that should have been the gift,—the spirit, Barry—which left me only with the substance—a lonely, lonely child.
"Gradually I have come to realise that, before I came back, harmony reigned at Whitewater Farms. Now, there is the slightest note of discord. I am conscious of it. I know the others are. I understand, now, it was inevitable.... I am Eris, daughter of Discord.... But for you, Eris and Eros are merged and one. I strike out the i!... Forever, Barry. I and i melt into U and you! My eyes, too. Darling! Did you ever suspect such silly wit in me?

And you know what? The Church of St-Cassilda is situated on a street that connects to the rue d'Auros. And d'Auros, well, that's one letter exchange away from d'Auris (which in French sounds like Or and Is together; Gold and Is). You know, d'Auros, like Athalie d'Auris, like Eros and Eris. And if you think that's a stretch, The Drums of Aulone is part of a sort of diptych with The Sun Hawk, like Ashes of Empire is part of a diptych with The Maids of Paradise. And, well, there is a Chevalier d'Auros in The Sun Hawk. Like most connections with Chambers, it's like there is an element of plausible deniability baked in but… I mean, come on. There are not a dozen of d'Auros or d'Auris in Chambers' work and the guy kept harping on about intentionality in his books for decades. And you know what's another meaningful/meaningless coincidence, in a column from a newspaper about funny, pithy things that have been said by famous people, there's one from 1918 in which Chambers is quoted as lamenting the fact that war has changed how we write. More specifically, he laments that some people have begun to compare women to shells. Like a hollow shell within which raged a sea of fire, maybe? Could be another

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and fear"; "my very soul in such a turmoil of rage"; "words that scorched me to shame and kindled in me bitterness, contempt, and scorn immeasurable"; "scorched me—as though I had suddenly been envelopped in heavenly flames. Every ardent drop of blood was afire".

[61] One might be reminded of the protagonist of The Court of the Dragon from TKiY who is submerged in "waves of flame" when is brought to the abode of lost souls (aka Carcosa).

[62] The Ausone Woods also play an important part in this. Just like the Aulnes Wood in L'Ombre.

coincidence. But how about the other Camilla? She appears in Ailsa Paige, in fact she is the titular Ailsa Paige's cousin and one of the few things we learn about her is that she sometimes cries. Unlike the Cassilda in TKiY whose tears remain unshed. Unlike several characters in Chambers whose unshed tears are dried by wrath[63]. Cassilda the flame, Camilla the tearful cousin. Michelle the fiery red-head, Athalie the languid, water-coded cousin. Michelle's name has a prominent "ch" sound, which is very similar to a prominent "ss" sound, and Athalie Elven has two prominent "el" sounds. Like Ailsa and Camilla in Ailsa Paige who are, again, cousins.

Anyway, at one point Michelle and Athalie, who are on the run and in hiding, decide to have some fun. They mask up and join an impromptu night-life carnival. This is where Michelle meets her love interest. A bit like how a yellow and red-coded Harlequin meets his green-coded princess-like love-interest during Chambers' most substantial masked ball in The Streets of Ascalon. A bit like the main character of The Talkers, who is dressed as a king, encounters two other characters dressed as kings, a yellow one and a red one, as well as a character nicknamed The Queen in Green during that book's masked ball. But this bit of night-time fun ends in tragedy when by pure chance all these characters encounter the Sun King, Gribouri and the orange-coded (courage and ruthlessness amongst other qualities) son of Comte Frontenac. A dramatic unmasking ensues and Michelle lets out a cry of despair. Which echoes one of the only things we know about Cassilda from TKiY, that she lets out a bitter cry[64]. And what else do we know about Cassilda from TKiY? That her voice is dead. Well, it just so happens that Michelle loses her singing voice at some point. Perhaps the accumulation of little resonances is finally sounding like a cacophony that cannot be ignored. Anyway, the unmasking seals Michelle's fate and she ends up in prison. And it might not be underwater but it's underground and this is where Michelle undergoes an inner change, a sort of katabasis. When she is finally released, she comes out changed for the better, she comes out golden. Or maybe yellow, because gold and silver are ostentatious and flashy, Michelle d'Aulone even has her name changed, she is now Michelle Larousse.

She then crosses the Atlantic and immigrates to New-France where she goes on further adventure. As a resident of Québec City, I'm weirdly happy that Québec is quite yellow-coded and is legit described as if it were a Venetian Duchy full of intrigue[65]. In a sense, we even have our own little Carcosa Castle (Aulone is both lands a castle), meaning the ancestor of the Château Frontenac, the Château Saint-Louis. And Frontenac, who has eyes which can turn

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[63] Here's one example from The Adventures of Man: "the two bright tears in her eyes had dried unshed. Wrath may have dried them". Here's another one from The Reckoning: "Appalled, almost unmanned, I bowed my head still lower as the quick tears of rage wet my lashes. They dried, unshed." And another from Who Goes There!: She turned her head swiftly, and sat for a moment while the starting tears dried in her eyes, unshed. They dried slowly while the battle raged within her…".

[64] "Suddenly all my terrors burst out in a cry of despair…" (TDoA) vs. "and that bitter cry of Cassilda, "Not upon us, oh King, not upon us!"" / "Camilla's agonized scream and the awful words echoing through the dim streets of Carcosa" (TKiY). About the "Not upon us, oh King!" part: There is a great speech in A King and A Few Dukes/Witch Sylvia (it seems like more care was put in it than in all of the rest of the book combined; I'm slightly exaggerating) which echoes it. You know, if Chambers ever did something as wild as hide a TKiY play in his other works (as scattered fragments), surely it would have to include that speech (unless it belongs to a queenly play).

[65] And a bit flabbergasted by the fact that the obscure town where I grew up and which I can't remember ever seen mentioned in any fictional work I've read/watched/whatever is mentioned in both The Drums of Aulone and The Sun Hawk.

yellow (like a few key characters, including Chambers' no.1 villain, Walter Butler). Oh, and there is a Madame Lambeaux in Drums of Aulone, a name which can be translated as Madame Tatters. You know, like the famous tatters of TKiY himself. And more importantly, the book ends with Michelle lamenting that Aulone is forever lost to them[66]. Like the dim and lost Carcosa of TKiY. Also, like Dahut in Le foyer breton's version of the Ker-Is legend, Michelle is, at one point, in possession of a very crucial key.

Also, In The Gold Chase (1927), released the same year as TDoA, there is Louis Aulone who goes camping alone in a place called Solitude (Chambers is a bit on the nose with the names). What happens? He finds a grave marker with his own name on it or rather, his ancestor's name which is also Louis (d')Aulone. This marks the beginning of a treasure hunt (lots of those in later works) which ultimately brings about his death. And as you might know, Bierce's An Inhabitant of Carcosa is about the titular inhabitant coming across his own tomb.

But while I think that the tragedy of Carcosa is, in a way, reflected in the plot of The Drums of Aulone, I believe it's an image of it which is distorted. It's not the real tragedy of Carcosa, because the real tragedy is much more metaphysical. In a story called The Snows of Yesteryears, we get perhaps a stronger indication of what the story of Carcosa is all about. That story is about the lost works of François Villon, it features characters analogous to Hastur and Pirious Louis (but quite orange-coded) and it also includes talk of a Court of Miracles, a devil wind which drives people to certain strange places and an unnamed cité (although it is certainly Paris) with ominous towers. Side note, the Hastur-like character literally has the world falcon in his name (de Montfaucon) and, you know, Hastur is a falconer in The Demoiselle d'Ys. In The Snows of Yesteryear, Villon also jokes about being a Prince in his own right, which reminded me of Hildred Castaigne in The King in Yellow who says he is *"King by my right in Hastur"*, and he adds that he is Seneschal of Castel-Rien. Caste-Nothing. And he further explains that Castle-Nothing is located behind the Moon and it's a place where one can live on air. Villon adds the following about Castle-Nothing : *"the realm of which I speak of is of the Soul"*.

[As Above, So Below] It Takes A Man In Tatters to Dream of Being King

So, earlier I was telling you about what new found convictions watching Flawed Peacock's video might leave you with. One of those concerns TKiY's structure. Because Flawed Peacock posits that TKiY works as a color-coded thematic gradient. And his in-depth analysis bears this out remarkably well. Actually, it pretty much 100% proves it. TKiY starts at its most deluded and yellow-coded and slowly but surely this deluded yellow gets washed out of the book. This is why the book starts out with a lot of Carcosa-related lore and gradually loses touch with this fantastical mythology, only to reconnect with a more grounded version of our world. The poem section marks the transition point. Grosso modo, what you need to know is that Chambers would color-code his thematic concerns. In fact, I'm pretty sure it's a nine or ten color scheme.

[66] "But Aulone and Maniscamp are lost to us forever..."

There are more than two themes per color, but just to illustrate what I mean, let me give you two themes per those nine colors: yellow is vision and delusion (although of course, it's also disconnection from reality, egoism and madness), green is love and hate (and also a form of judge, jury and absolver dynamic), purple is death and life without illusions (hence why Castaigne couldn't deal), orange is courage and ruthlessness, blue is absence and yearning, red is poverty and ignorance (which is made thoroughly explicit in The Fifth Horseman; oh, and it's also violence), gray is wisdom and transmission, black is erasure and transformation and white becoming and returning. Or rather black is the divided self and white is reunification or individuation. The integration of the shadow side.

But it's not as simple as it sounds because Chambers' human characters are a mix of colors. A bit like with astrology, you've got your solar sign, your ascendant or rising sign and your lunar sign. In fact, it's useful to approach Chambers' characters as both a rotating cast of commedia de'll arte characters or actors and as a rotating cast who get different color-coding or astrological signs each time. A yellow-coded Pierrot is rather different than a red-coded Pierrot but it's still a Pierrot. Same for a gray-coded Hastur and an orange-coded Hastur. They're different but they're still Hastur. A friend of mine once described this whole thing as resembling a dispersive prism. Send in a purely yellow light and all you get is yellow. Send in a mixed yellow and you'll get a whole array of colors. The prism reveals complexities because they were already present, it reveals and amplifies what is already latent there. But once you know where to look, you'll see the complexity even before the light goes through the prism. Knowing what someone is trying to do with a work of art makes its structure more legible. Not that you can ever solve a work of art or anything. At least, I have no pretension of doing so. But I would like to understand all of this better, maybe so would you?

Anyway, as you might have noticed, TKiY's structure also works as a mirror. I can't remember if that's also something Flawed Peacock says in his video but chances are it is. In any case, I believe that it is structured as a mirror and I think it can be proven. How? Well, there's this chapter called The Mirrored Face in Ashes of Empire. Here's an excerpt from it:

He gazed, startled, at that other face in the mirror as though he had detected a criminal—a secret assassin of himself who had fawned and flattered him through all those years—a treacherous thing that now suddenly leered at him, unmasked, malignant, triumphant. In that bitter moment, as he stared back at the face in the mirror, he realised for the first time in his life that he had detected himself. Hitherto his fits of depression and repentance had been followed by nothing but self-contempt, which led to recklessness. Now he saw more; he saw his own soul, warped and twisted with egotism…

When Harewood, the protagonist of Ashes of Empire, has his moral realization, it's like he's standing on a threshold. He sees what he's becoming and what he could be if he was truer to his higher self/vulnerable self. He's facing down two paths lying before him: salvation (actually facing life/death without illusions) or damnation (disconnection from reality, living in a mirage). But while moral realizations are all well and good, it's easy to fall back in one's old patterns and this is exactly what Harewood does. It's not what you know, it's what you do with it :

He had made up his mind to ask forgiveness, to assure her of his esteem for her, to acknowledge his inexcusable fault. That's what he had come down stairs for. But now, when he looked at her, he realised that it was too late. There was nothing he could say which would not hurt her. The quality called tact is highly developed in the selfish. This is not a paradox; generosity has nothing to do with tact. Harewood's regeneration had not as yet robbed him of his tact…

Indeed, Harewood needs more than one moral realization and more than one encounter with life/death without illusions to finally have his real breakthrough. Here is a similar realization by Desboro from The Business of Life :

… [he was] happy because he was so deeply in love, fearful because of it—and, deep in his soul, miserable, afraid lest aught out of his past life return again to mock her—lest some echo of folly offend her ears—some shadow fall—some phantom of dead days rise from their future hearth to stand between them.

It is that way with a man who has lived idly and irresponsibly, and who has gone lightly about the pleasure of life and not its business. For sometimes there arrives an hour of unbidden clairvoyance—not necessarily a spiritual awakening—but a moment of balanced intelligence and sanity and clear vision. And when it arrives, the road to yesterday suddenly becomes visible for its entire length; and when a man looks back he sees it stretching away behind him, peopled with every shape that has ever traversed it, and every spectre that ever has haunted it.

Sorrow for what need not have been, regret and shame for what had been—and the bitterness of the folly—the knowledge, too late, of what he could have been [...]. All this Desboro was beginning to realise now. And many men have realised it when the tardy understanding came too late. For what has been is still and will be always; and shall appear here or hereafter, or after that—somewhere, sometime, inevitably, inexorably. There is no such thing as expunging what has been, or of erasing what is to be. All records stand; hope lies only in lengthening the endless chapters—chapters which will not be finished when the sun dies, and the moon fails, and the stars go out forever[67]*.*

In Chambers' work, one of the stories he most likes to tell is that of the "egoist" in search of "moral regeneration". And those stories basically all have a variation of a tri-partite mirror structure. The protagonist realizes something about themselves (sometimes when literally looking at the mirror), he works on himself/reconnects with his vulnerable self and ends up with his twin flame. Integration inside and out. Or it's the alchemical journey; nigredo, albedo,

[67] And here's a bit from later, after Desboro has done the work. He asks for Jacqueline's forgiveness and receives it: "You have them all [love, faith and forgiveness]. Now give me yours, Jim." / "I give you all—except forgiveness. I have nothing to forgive." / "You dear boy—you don't know—you will never know how much you have to forgive me. But if I told you, I know you'd do it. So—let it rest—forgotten forever. How fragrant the night is growing! And I can hear the brook at intervals when the wind changes—very far away—very far—as far as fairyland—as far as the abode of the Maker of Moons." / "Who was he, dear?" / "Yu Lao. It's Chinese—and remote—lost in mystery eternal—where the white soul of her abides who went forth 'between tall avenues of spears, to die.' And that is where all things go at last, Jim—even the world and the moon and stars—all things—even love—returning to the source of all."

rubeddo. As above, so below. You've got the distorted side of the mirror, through a glass darkly, you've got the rim, the transition, and you've got the right side of the mirror, the facing of life without illusions. I'm willing to bet that if there's a King in Yellow play, the second act drives people mad because it forces you to confront life without illusions, not some sanity destroying cosmic monster. In the case of Ashes of Empire, the tri-partite thing is reflected twice in the structure; via that specific chapter (the failed attempt) and via the book itself (the successful attempt). With Business of Life, it's also made very explicit that the story is reflected in the book's structure. You start with your semi-deluded Desboro who's not quite ready to work on himself (he's almost there). At some point there is transitory interlude, like an entre-acte in theater. And that interlude is literally a poem-reading/song-playing sequence (and also the playing of a visual/color symphony) that happens to take place at the transition point in Desboro's quest of personal growth (perhaps even more so for the heroine but more on her later).

Then the sun shows up (metaphorically speaking), Desboro continues to grow, proving his commitment and his moral regeneration. And finally, the twin flames end up together. Through a glass darkly (a story of delusion), the mirror's rim (the poems/the "work") and the right side of the mirror (back to reality, the road towards integration). That's also the structure of TKiY which you could say is about a man (Chambers) looking at the mirror. Not that Chambers is the King in Yellow but he's dreaming of being king and his soul is gradually turning yellow. Or at least, that's one way to look at TKiY. You might think it's a stretch. Personally, I've come across that story (and the fact that it's reflected in its structure) too often in far too many books by Chambers to think it doesn't mean anything. Also, you might be more convinced if you read Another Good Man which I think contains one of the least flattering auto-biographically inclined depictions of Chambers (unless I'm mistaking, Freddie Farley is the only protag who is explicitly from Brooklyn, where Chambers was born). And also, there is a great video by Dr. Bowers from PhD&D called The King in Yellow in The Real World[68] which kind of blew my mind when I watched it. In it, Dr. Bowers explores several of the possible sources of influence on The King in Yellow. One of which is good old Oscar Wilde. And he quotes a passage from The Picture of Dorian Gray which made my ears pop and which might kind of confirm all of this. Let's see if it does the same for you:

It was a novel without a plot and with only one character, being, indeed, simply a psychological study of a certain young Parisian who spent his life trying to realize in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own, and to sum up, as it were, in himself the various moods through which the world-spirit had ever passed, loving for their mere artificiality those renunciations that men have unwisely called virtue, as much as those natural rebellions that wise men still call sin. The style in which it was written was that curious jewelled style, vivid and obscure at once, full of argot and of archaisms, of technical expressions and of elaborate paraphrases, that characterizes the work of some of the finest artists of the French school of Symbolistes. There were in it metaphors as monstrous as orchids and as subtle in colour. The life of the senses was described in the terms of mystical philosophy. One hardly knew at times whether one was reading the spiritual ecstasies of some mediæval

[68] You can watch it here.

saint or the morbid confessions of a modern sinner. It was a poisonous book. The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain. The mere cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced in the mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious of the falling day and creeping shadows.

As he tells us, this describes an actual book: Joris-Karl Huysman's À rebours. A clear influence on Wilde and probably Chambers too, more specifically an influence on his fictional play. But in a certain sense, I think Chambers was also influenced by it for TKiY too. The book as a whole, I mean. Except, the book might be the polar opposite of the play. The antidote to such a poison, if you will (unless the play also is an antidote). Because while, in a sense, TKiY is a book without a plot and concerns only one man looking at the mirror and who sees both the external world and his own inner world reflected back to him in a wild array of colors, it ends with its feet firmly planted back into reality. Unlike many works of decadent fiction it doesn't end with death or madness. It ends with death and madness being narrowly avoided thanks to a confrontation with life without illusion. The problem with narcissistic defenses and ego imbalance is that it makes you ping pong between thinking you're oh-so-great-and-special and thinking you're a piece of shit… but a special piece of shit (it's the crown of kings or the crown of thorns but there's always a crown). They keep you disconnected from real-life. Because in real-life, most people are neither kings or devils and most people probably include you and me.

Interestingly enough, as Chambers is more interested in variations than exact repetitions, his "egoists" are not all morally equivalent. Some are jerks who realize that it's time to stop treating people like toys (and that their actions have consequences) and some are hurt people who have disconnected from themselves or others for too long. You can be too inside your own head and have blinders concerning your actions/others/life for different reasons. Case in point, one of those egoists is Oliver Lock, the protagonist of Outsiders (1898). A novel about a fledgling writer who comes back from Europe to try to make it in the New York literary scene without compromising on his artistic integrity. Disillusion follows (although ultimately, he reaches success without artistic compromise). Could it be more than a little autobiographical? I think so and I think it's also more than a little bit of a fantasy (cope, if you will). The first half is about Oliver stubbornly trying to make it alone on his own without any help and without any reputation to speak off. Oliver is not a bad fellow but he has some annoyingly strong narcissistic defenses, he's more than a little deluded and he lives like a hermit, refusing help that is literally offered when he needs it most. He's trying to finish and sell his first piece of writing which is called Winged Boy. He ends up homeless despite the fact this could have been averted had he accepted the help of certain people or if he had asked for help. But after living through a sort of katabasis in the street which involves being shadowed by a conspicuously yellow dog (a recurring motif in Chambers), Oliver learns to let his defenses down (with people he can trust anyway, the solution is not to get rid of defenses completely), to accept help and to grow as a person.

Of course, he ends up with his twin flame. And this brings us to the other story that Chambers most loves to tell, that of a girl torn between love and hate, who risks an inner conflagration because of fiery and difficult to control emotions and an inner drowning, a tendency towards morbidity (actually, those things are also present with our male egoists and both figures have a lot of similarities that manifest a bit differently depending on the variations). Like Gilda Greenway from The Talkers who is described as “the girl with two souls” in the original serialization. Her journey is one of integration. She must unite her divided self before she can unite with her twin flame (and again, that’s also something that is present with male figures). In Eris (1922), the titular Eris lives in a backwater farm where she dreams of transcendence. At 18, she writes, acts and produces her own little play about a Winged Girl. Eris is also explicitly referred to as an “outsider”, is associated with nature and she goes homeless for a while. And if I remember correctly, she’s a red-head. And also, there are doubts concerning her familial antecedents. Why is that relevant?

Because that’s part of that story that Chambers loved to tell. It’s not just about a woman with a divided sense of self, it’s about a “beautiful wom[a]n of doubtful antecedents who inhabit[s] forest glades[69]”. And I'd add to that descriptor that she's often fleeing or living in the wake of a flight (knowingly or not) from the wrath of a man who wants revenge for a question of familial wrongs. In Lorraine, you’ve got the titular heroine whom the hero literally first meets in a forest and he does so in a chapter called Maker of Maps, no less. We later learn that she’s also not the real daughter of the mad father figure (in this case, a mad inventor, just like Yu Lao from The Maker of Moons) with whom she lives (just like Ysonde and Yu-Lao from The Maker of Moons) and who is also implicated in a matter of family revenge. Such characters, whether they are actually orphans or not, are often living under new/false names and in new places, like Lorraine, but also like Eris[70], Michelle of Aulone[71], the heroine in Cardigan, Jacqueline from Maids of Paradise, et cetera. In the case of the last two, they also live at one point with a mad father figure. Hell, Constance in The Repairer of Reputations is a less overt variation of this recurring type. But enough about this. What’s that about there being a larger Chamberian Mythos?

[Chambersian Lost Media] The Extended King in Yellow Mythos

Before we tackle the lost media part, let’s try to make sense of this larger Chambersian Mythos. To do so, let’s start by making a list of all books or stories which are directly connected to TKiY:

In the Quarter (1895) (novel): Features Clifford, Elliott, Rowden and Braith (who’s confirmed to be older than the other guys and to have lived through the 1870-71 Siege of Paris) from the Latin Quarter clique[72] which is better known for being in TKiY.

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[69] Chambers’ own self-aware description from The Silent Land.
[70] Who changes her surname more than once and who must escape a sort of familial revenge, albeit one brought upon by her ex-husband.
[71] When imprisoned, Michelle d’Aulone (nicknamed Roussette) has her name legally changed to Michelle Larousse.
[72] Also part of that clique but not present in In the Quarter are the recurring characters of Severn, Selby and Colette.

The Red Republic[73] (1895) (novel): Includes an excerpt from a fictional opera called Sylvia Elven. Ciphers are involved. There are also several more indirect references to TKiY. The main couple is called Philip Landes[74] and Jeanne de Brassac, for example. Philip and Jeanne, like the couple at the center of The Demoiselle d'Ys. There's also a mention of the Carcassonne poem[75]. Actually, let me take a tangent with this one as it will allow me to tackle how Chambers works in some of his allusions which echo in multiple directions.

It's a well-known fact that, Carcassonne, or Carcassona in Occitan, is probably the main inspiration for Carcosa. Nowadays, the case honestly makes itself since, as was pointed out by Kenneth Hite and others, Carcassonne in Latin is Carcaso (which I probably don't need to tell you is Carcosa with the second "a" trading places with the "o"). But as always, it's important to reiterate that Robert W. Chambers didn't invent the city of Carcosa, he only integrated it in his mythos. Again, it's from An Inhabitant of Carcosa by Ambrose Bierce. But if you're not convinced that the name Carcosa was inspired by Carcassonne, there's another thing to consider which might or might not be relevant. In the version of An Inhabitant of Carcosa that most people are familiar with, the story starts with a fictional quote which is attributed to the prophet Hali. But this version of the story is actually one that was slightly revised by Bierce after its first publication. When it came out in 1886, the quote was attributed to a book by Brayconne. Carcaso, Carcosa, Carcassonne, Brayconne, or hell, Brayçonne if you imagine there's a cedilla on the "c". Now, "onne" is not the most rare of French suffixes but still, with the combination of Carcosa being one letter exchange away from the city's Latin name, it gains in interest. Especially when you consider the Arabic elements of the story and the fact that, notably, Carcassonne was conquered by the Moors in 719. In fact, it's worth noting that Muslim leader who led the troops that took the French region of la Septimanie (to which Carcassonne belonged), Musa ibn Nusayr, is in large parts remembered today because of his role in the legend of the lost The City of Brass. A story about a strange mythical place which is lost in the desert, whose inhabitants are dead or undead and which symbolizes the senseless quest for material riches and which is associated with delusions of power, madness and death. A city whose name in Arabic is derived from a word that means "yellow copper".

Also, considering that the aforementioned ibn Nusayr is mentioned in both Viollet-le-Duc's book on Carcassonne and in the One Thousand and One Nights, I'm sure Chambers was tickled with those associations (and that this partly informed his choice of repurposing Carcosa). Why? Because one of Chambers' favorite books, or at least one of the books he most often refers to is the One Thousand and One Nights. And also because, well, the writings of Viollet-le-Duc are

[73] There is a journal called The Red Republic in The Young Man's Girl (1933/1934).
[74] Landes is also the surname of one of Hildred Castaigne's ancestors; Edythe Landes Castaigne. The heroine of The Fighting Chance is called Sylvia Landis.
[75] From The Red Republic: "It was for the diamonds that they had murdered her father. Had they also murdered her? He could hear the officer in the next room working over the inanimate body of the servant, who still clutched in her stiffened hand the fragment of a reticule. Had the diamonds been in that? He sat miserably trying to find some clue to the tragedy, his head in his hands, his heart throbbing painfully, but the face of Jeanne de Brassac rose incessantly before his eyes, and his thoughts would wander back to the firelight and the sweet voice that sang "I never shall see Carcassonne."" Not sure if this is relevant but diamond theft is central to a handful of Chambers' writings, like The Man At the Next Table and The Flaming Jewel.

referred to in Chambers' own novel Smoke of Battle. (And, I mean, the guy knew a ton about architecture, had an architect brother and was the biggest American lover of Paris there ever was, of course, he knew about Viollet-le-Duc). Oh, and one last thing about Viollet-le-Duc, he was responsible for the fortifications of Paris during the Franco-Prussian War, he wrote a memoir on the siege, he created a fictional/fantastical city in one of his architecture books, he saw France's defeat as a sign of its decadence (in Lorraine a decadent madness is sweeping through France and Chambers explicitly makes links its apotheosis to the Commune) and he was condemned to death by the Commune of Paris before he exiled himself in Switzerland. And, well, Chambers' The Red Republic is about the Commune of Paris. I don't think the Carcassonne mention is innocent or simple. (Also, Carcassonne has that -onne sonority like Aulone and Ausone). Again, it echoes in different directions.

The Silent Land (1896) (short story): The only story outside of TKiY to mention Carcosa. It's also part of the Ysonde trilogy which we'll get into soon enough. The Seventh Seal and a cat named Solomon are involved (in another story there is a cipher called the Seal of Solomon). It also parallels the undead messenger type adventure that we find in The Yellow Sign and The Messenger.

The White Shadow (1897) (short story): A Brittany-set story that features Clifford and Elliott and Rowden. It's also full of resonances with TKiY but the presence of these three characters make for a concrete undeniable link to TKiY. It directly ties into a story called The Key to Grief. The surname Ylven is present in it (one letter exchange away from Elven). It mentions ciphers.

Ambassador Extraordinary, Another Good Man and Enter the Queen (1898) (short stories): That's a trio of stories that features the Latin Quarter gang. Clifford, Elliott and Selby are present in all three stories, Rowden appears in Ambassador Extraordinary and Another Good Man, Colette is mentioned in Ambassador Extraordinary and she appears in Enter the Queen, Braith appears in Another Good Man and Severn appears in Ambassador Extraordinary.

The Maids of Paradise (1903) (novel): Includes a character who goes under the name of Sylvia Elven and several elements of interest that we'll get into soon. Ciphers are mentioned.

The Younger Set (1907) (novel): Includes a visit from The Phantom of the Past and what reads like a trip to Carcosa. Ciphers are mentioned.

The Talkers[76] (1923) (novel): The heroine is nicknamed The Queen in Green. Just a fun call-back? Well, it could have been but why then is this the book where the fate of Clifford, Rowden and, perhaps in an indirect way, Elliott, are revealed? Curiously enough, I never saw anything anywhere about the fact that The Talkers is directly connected to the TKiY in that way (meaning through the Clifford/Rowden connection). Have you? Early on, there is a masked ball in which people are dressed as kings and queens. One of the most central characters who acts like the shadow self of the protagonist (Sutton vs Sadoul) is dressed in fluttering red robes while his inseparable "friend", Dr. Pockman (whose constantly referred to as pallid) is dressed in yellow robes (Sutton, Sadoul and Pockman are in a sense three sides of the same coin; like two New York cousins and a certain person who is mostly known by his nickname), and Gilda Greenway, again "the girl with two souls", is dressed in green and is called the Queen in Green. In a sense, there is also a third character who makes the queen in green a sort of tri-partite being. Oh, and there is also an older man wearing purple. Someone dies at his party. Also à propos of nothing, but the illustrations for the serialized version of The Talkers are gorgeous. If it ever gets a proper reedition and those illustrations are not part of it, someone messed up. (In fact, say what you will about the kind of middle-brow magazines in which Chambers' stuff appeared but many of them had absolutely stellar illustrators on their payrolls.)

The Drums of Aulone (aka The Fear of God) (1927) (novel): Even less plausibly than The Talkers, I've never heard of The Drums of Aulone talked about as being connected to TKiY despite the fact that Hastur and Piriou Louis from Demoiselle d'Ys are actually present here. As we've seen earlier. Ciphers are involved.

How about we go for a more inclusive approach, a second degree of connection. Now, if we follow all threads of connections (and there are many, we'd end up linking up with most of what Chambers has written in his life), so let's just go for some of the most pertinent ones :

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[76] There is a lot of talk about the dichotomy between Talkers and Doers in that novel, as well as how words can make us believe in some very dangerous illusions. The Talkers are at one point called the "the Ancient and Unmitigated Order of Talkers". The way they are described makes them sound like an esoteric order at times (and several of their "members" are explicitly dabbling in the occult) but it's not a formal club. While we do find a lot of "gentleman's clubs" and even a few secret societies in Chambers, there are few esoteric ones. In terms of secret societies worth noting, there are the real-life Knights of the Golden Circle (bad guys in Secret Service Operator 13) and a fictional secret society called the Ægean League which plays an important role in The Laughing Girl (their motto is "Grecian gift and Spanish fig / Help the fool his grave to dig"). One hedge case is The Hell Fire Club from The Rake and the Hussy. Probably an allusion to the real-life Hellfire Club (aka Order of the Friars of St Francis of Wycombe aka The Order of the Second Circle) which has some esoteric connections. A later iteration of the club had "Do what thou wilt" as its motto; a motto which Aleister Crowley, formerly of the Golden Dawn, would later repurpose. When Chambers put the disparate stories that would form The Tree of Heaven together, he added a flimsy frame-story in which we find out that a few members of the Lenox Club (often mentioned in Chambers) are apparently part of an inner circle, they have no name but they congregate around a "thrice reincarnated" "adept" who has written the "three world-famous volumes, "Occult Philosophy," "The Weight of Human Souls," and "The Interstellar Laws of Psychic Phenomena"', who has travelled all the way to Lhassa, who holds the "Chair of Psychical Philosophy in the great University of Trebizond" and who "was the confidential adviser of the Shah of Persia, the mentor of the Ameer of Afghanistan, the inspirer of the greatest diplomat of all the East—the late Akhound of Swat." And, well, there are the Pythagorans of The Man At the Next Table, a pretty funny satire on esotericists everywhere (including Theosophists), but don't seem to be very secretive. In that story, the "Professor" wants to make the unwilling protagonist his "pupil". In The Tree of Heaven, the protagonist of The Carpet of Belshazzar says this at the end of his story: "He has never returned to America, but now that the time has come for me to fulfill my part, I do so, setting down what I know and what occult information I have received in letters from him, of the strange fate which overtook, separately, each and every man present at that farewell dinner at the Lenox Club. My own fate is stranger still—to record these facts and take my position as his historian and his disciple."

The Maker of Moons (1896) (novella): The first story in the Ysonde trilogy which includes The Silent Land. This trilogy is about a Chamberian stand-in/protagonist who tells the reader how he met his wife, Ysonde (and Ysonde chastises him directly at the end of both The Maker of Moons and The Silent Land). From the most fantastical version (The Maker of Moons), to a still fantastical but more grounded version (The Silent Land) to the most realistic version (The Black Water). That gradient again. Ysonde is a rarer variant of the name Iseult (as in Tristan and Iseult) and as there are actually three characters called Iseult in those stories and since Chambers himself was a huge fan of medieval romances[77], I'm rather certain this isn't a coincidence. Ciphers are mentioned.

Lorraine (1896) (novel): Part of the quadrilogy about the Franco-Prussian War of 1871 (alongside The Red Republic, Ashes of Empire and The Maids of Paradise). It mentions Chaské and Harpan. The heroine is introduced in a chapter called Maker of Maps and her father is a mad inventor like Yu-Lao. There's also a White Lodge which is quite important but now is not the time to get into it. Also, an infectious madness is said to be sweeping France. There are lots of interesting thematic connections, but those are the more concrete connections. Ciphers are mentioned.

The Black Water (1896) (short story): The third story in the Ysonde trilogy. It also acts as the most realistic version of the Demoiselle d'Ys type story.

Passeur (1897) (short story): One of those Brittany-set stories. We'll get back to it but it connects to The Maids of Paradise.

Ashes of Empire (1898) (novel): It directly connects to The Maids of Paradise via the presence and mention of two characters. In fact, they share the same antagonist, the one and only Buckhurst. Although Chambers does retcon his first name.

The Purple Emperor, Pompe funèbre and The Messenger (1898) (short stories): Another little trilogy. A Brittany-set trilogy. Features The Purple Emperor and a minor character called Mr. Terrec (not to be confused with Trevec, the guy who's nicknamed The Purple Emperor). In The Messenger, there is also the surname of Ylven (one letter exchange away from Elven, obviously).

The Key to Grief (1897) (short story): In The White Shadow, we get a strange glimpse of the story of The Key to Grief (the bit that has some Dakota language in it). This story refers to Chaské and Harpan/Harpam.

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[77] Amongst the medieval works that Chambers makes explicit references to, we find the likes of La Chanson de Roland (judging by frequence alone, this must be his favorite), Le Roman de la Rose (Beating Winds both mentions Le Roman de la Rose and quotes La Chanson de Roland), Orlando Furioso (which is also about Roland), the Tristan and Iseult legends, Jerusalem Delivered and the works of François Villon. And there's also a lot that relates to the Arthurian legends. This of course is not an extensive listing and I imagine that if I knew more than next to nothing about medieval literature, I might have identified other relevant allusions..

Collector of the Port (1898) (short story): The murderous trio from The Key to Grief are also featured here and the events leading to that story are alluded to.

Iole (1905) (novella): Contains an excerpt of an opérette called The Inca (The Song of the Undertaker).

The Firing Line (1908) (novel): Contains a symbol that appears in only two places in 87 books; a yellow rose. It's jokingly referred to when someone says that the rites of the yellow rose are even more mysterious than the rites of the Rosicrucians. Where else does it appear? In one of the epigrams included in TKiY. It also mentions an opérette called The Inca and a song called Chaské. Also features The Phantom of the Future.

The Sun Hawk (1928) (novel): Forms a diptych with The Drums of Aulone (the Quebec/Frontenac diptych if you will). It only shares actual historical characters with it, except for maybe one indirect reference to a completely fictional character. I'm not sure but I think The Drums of Aulone refers to Stanhope's first girlfriend; the actress (who reminded me of a more decadent version of the heroine of The Painted Minx, Sylvia, who ends up staring in a play named The Painted Minx whose story reflects the story of the novel itself). Also both books mention The Island Princess for some reason. Despite not sharing the same heroes as The Drums of Aulone, in a certain way it completes it (the Drums of Aulone is mostly about the journey of integration of the female heroine (it is narrated by her) and The Sun Hawk is mostly about the journey of integration of the male hero (it is narrated by him)).

For this document, I'll skip the Yian-Erlik-Marmora-Tenedos-Naxos-Boznovia[78] web of connections and why A King and a Few Dukes, The Girl Philippa, Barbarians, The Dark Star, The Slayer of Souls and In Secrets are all related[79]. Otherwise I'd have to get into how Chambers integrated misinformation about the Yezidis, Mongol Shamanism, the sect of the Assassins and Hasan-i Sabbah into his extended mythology. And I'd have to tackle Chambers' fictional "conspiracy" about The Knights Templars of Tenedos, the lost Venetian Duchy of Naxos, the mystery of the Cyclades, the descendants of Djani the Paladin, The House of Châtillon-Montréal, The Princess of Marmora and the last living heir of a forgotten throne. It's a

[78] The city of Yian appears in both The Maker of Moons (which, again, is part of the Ysonde trilogy, a trilogy whose second entry mentions Carcosa) and The Slayer of Souls. Erlik is identified as the unseen otherworldly influence wreaking havoc on Earth in The Dark Star and The Slayer of Souls. (Erlik is also mentioned in The Carpet of Belshazzar and in The Crimson Tide.) Marmora first appears in A King and a Few Dukes, whose heroine is in fact the Princess of Marmora, before returning in The Girl Philippa where it is central to the plot; as the Principality of Mamora and Tenedos. It's also in The Dark Star via a mention of "the Queen of Marmora". Tenedos and Naxos (an island of the Cyclades; which are mentioned in The Young Man's Girl) are the lost lands for which the ex-princess heroine of The Laughing Girl longs for. In that book, there is a mention of a Goddess of the Cyclades and the Cyclades are compared to the Pleiades star clusters. Boznovia also first appears in A King and a Few Dukes and it is subsequently mentioned in Sybilla (The Green Mouse), Marlitt's Shoes (A Young Man in a Hurry) and The Case of Mr. Helmer (The Tree of Heaven). Considering that the Boznovian character of Madame Tzinglala takes her name from the vocables "tzing! la! la!" (used by Clifford in In the Quarter and in Ambassador Extraordinary), one could posit that The Princess Zimbamzin (from the titular story which appears in Quick Action) is a Boznovian since she takes her name from the vocables "zim-bam-zin" (used in The Maids of Paradise). All the more so since Boznovia is mentioned in Stranger Than Fiction (in a very metafictional way, I might add), also from Quick Action. And there is a Café Tenedos in Smoke of Battle.

[79] Worth noting that some of them even share character. John Recklow is in both In Secret and The Slayer of Souls and von Dresslin who is in both In Secret and Barbarians.

whole thing and I'm not sure I have the necessary historical knowledge to make any sense of it. In case you were wondering if Chambers was a kind of living encyclopedia or not.

Let's get back to characters who are queen and green coded, because there is Jacqueline Nevers from The Business of Life to consider. That's the 1913 novel that features a musical interlude that splits the book in two that I was telling you about. During that interlude, Jacqueline Nevers sings a song called The Maker of Moons and another one which is said to have been written by a certain Yu Lao, you know, the actual Maker of Moons from the story of the same name, that one is called Song of the Moon Moth. As for the piece he wrote, Song of the Moon Moth, it's about a night moth with green wings who bears the name of a queen. And more importantly, Jacqueline's father has the same name as Jeanne-la-flamme's father[80]. Why is that important? Because again, Jeanne-la-flamme is an historical figure who is mentioned in The Demoiselle d'Ys. And she also happens to be mentioned in The Messenger. And who else is mentioned alongside Jeanne-la-flamme in The Messenger? The Man in Purple Tatters (our previously mentioned Breton personification of death from Le foyer breton), and a king who receives yellow flowers. Oh, yeah, and the only other character with the name of Nevers is mentioned in a story called Enter the Queen. And who exactly is Jeanne-la-flamme? A woman who fought in The War of the Two Jeanne. Two Joans. Like the Demoiselle Jeanne d'Ys (Ys being a city which sinks under the wave) and Jeanne-la-flamme, Jeanne the flame. A divided self. And actually, the Man in Purple Tatters is also mentioned in The Silent Land and he's mentioned in a passage where we hear in quick succession of a queen who makes everything green and of the King of Carcosa. Purple, Green and Yellow.

So to repeat, throughout his career, we find a recurring character-type of a lonely girl (often an orphan) who is deeply associated with nature (sometimes the hero literally meets her in a forest glade, sometimes she has a name that's as on-the-nose as Helen Pine or Princess Sylvia), who is related to royalty or nobility (often unbeknownst to her), whose love is closely associated with judgement and absolution (a role which is particularly explicit in the case of Lorraine, Princess Sylvia of Marmora and Tenedos (from The King and A Few Dukes whose original title was Witch Sylvia) and Jacqueline Nevers), who is implicated in a history of familial revenge (usually implicating her adoptive father figure who is often a madman/an excentric) and who is portrayed has having a split sense of self. To use an image, the different faders/knobs on the sound consoles that represent this character-type sometimes slide up or down (there is an amount of variation, if you will) but nonetheless, the character constantly recurs for almost 40 years. You don't do that by accident. And you don't give the character who represents in many ways the apotheosis of that archetype the nickname of the Queen in Green and "the girl with two souls" for nothing. A character who in actuality is called freaking Gilda Greenway (the heroine of The Talkers), who is connected to nobility and who appears in a book explicitly tied to The King in Yellow, no less. Hell, many of them are linked to a lost family home. That happens in The Drums of Aulone, The Flaming Jewel, Lorraine, The Silent Land, The Girl Philippa, The Laughing Girl (the Venetian Duchies of Naxos and Tenedos), Whistling Cat, The Repairer of Reputations, The

[80] To be more precise, Jacqueline's dad is called Louis-Philippe Nevers but he's sometimes referred to simply as Louis Never. Jeanne-la-flamme's father is called Louis Ier de Nevers. Speaking of which, Lorraine's father is the Marquis de Nesville and Nesville means "new town/city" while Nevers means "new fort/town".

Gold Chase and a ton more). In the case of The Girl Philippa, we are even talking about the long lost heir to an actual throne (and yes, she has a really shifty, borderline mad father figure). And many of them have red-hair and sometimes even green-eyes (like a certain Sara, the queen of the Latin Quarter in Another Good Man). If that's not a recurring character type, I don't know what is.

And now that I think about it, the noble man who is Lorraine's father-figure in that book is, as you can guess, not her father. Her real father is Napoleon III. I'd have to reread parts of Drums of Aulone again, but I wonder if it isn't implied that Michelle's real father is Louis 14th. They do have similar temperaments, he has a conspicuous interest in her (he knows more of her life than one might expect) and there is mystery surrounding her dead mother. And her adoptive father-figure is described as being quite eccentric (and he becomes a coureur des bois, which makes him quite similar to Mr. Renard (Fox in English; probably because of the expression "crazy like a fox") from Cardigan who is a "madman" who is sure he is the father of an orphan girl). Another madman father figure is called The Lizard, by the way, it's a whole other character archetype which gets its own series of variations.

Anyway, what's that about Chambersian lost media? Well, it's about A Matter of Interest and The Mystery of Choice. So there's this book by Chambers' called The Mystery of Choice. It's his third short story collection and it's incredibly somber. Most of it could easily pass for a spiritual sequel to The King in Yellow. Hell, its first story is called The Purple Emperor. Plus you even get three returning characters from TKiY, the inseparable duo of Clifford and Elliott and their buddy, Rowden. And since most of the stories in the book are interconnected, the whole thing reads like what you would expect from a sequel to The King in Yellow. Or it would if it wasn't for A Matter of Interest, that's the collection's final story. Not only does this conclusion to The Mystery of Choice have nothing to do with what came before, but you couldn't ask for a more brutal tonal whiplash. Picture this. You're reading a book that constitutes entirely of really intense meditations on death and dying and suddenly, without transition, you're reading a breezy, farcical romance that you can't imagine yourself ever reading unless, maybe, you were sunbathing at the beach and the only thing you had on hand was an old copy of Cosmopolitan. Well, A Matter of Interest was originally published in Cosmopolitan. And you know what makes this even stranger? Less than a year later, Chambers would publish a story called Collector of the Port. What is it? Only the sequel to The Key to Grief, the penultimate story in The Mystery of Choice. Only a perfect thematic conclusion to that book. Only a story that would make TMoC's conclusion mirror TKiY's own conclusion. If it had been included. But if you don't think TKiY is a coherent and purposeful book, would this really sound weird? But what if you thought that TKiY's very structure was purposeful and thoughtful?

But back to A Matter of Interest. What's that one about? Not important. Who is it about? Some American guy who, like Chambers, went abroad to live and study in the Latin Quarter of Paris. It's explicitly about an important announcement. And it kind of is, although not the announcement which the story pretends to be about. It's also about an author who doesn't like to admit he has been heavily influenced by Maurice Maeterlinck. Side note, did you know that Chambers once gifted a copy of a Maeterlinck book of poetry to a random journalist just

because she expressed interest in the Belgian author in one of her columns? Did you know that The King in Yellow itself was influenced by the work of Maeterlinck and that Chambers only mentions Maeterlinck in stuff with obvious autobiographical elements (including The Talkers which is directly linked to TKiY)?

Anyway, A Matter of Interest is also about an author who is successfully making the transition from writing so-called serious literature to writing so-called popular literature, of the romantic kind. Something Chambers was literally in the process of doing at the time. And so successfully was he transitioning, that Chambers would soon become one of richest and most well-known American authors of his day. But more importantly, A Matter of Interest is about a guy who literally says, and I quote, *"I am the author"* and who then proceeds to disown his earlier color-coded, Maeterlinck-inspired books called Faded-Fig Leaves. And what colors do fig leaves go through when they fade? They start green, they become yellow and they end up brown with purplish veins. So I've been alluding to color-coded themes and characters related to purple/The Purple Emperor (which is not just a character with a neat nickname, but also an entity that represents death and life without illusion; and of course, certain characters live under his sign) and green/The Queen in Green (same; love and hate). And guess what? Yellow/gold, green and purple are the official colors representing the King of the American Mardi Gras and that's been officiously true since at least 1872. Funny coincidence. Especially since Chambers was really big into carnivals and since he wrote a poem called Mardi Gras in the 1890s. What are the chances he didn't know about the official colors? The dude was a walking encyclopedia and this is a subject that interested him. And consider this, there is a frankly ridiculous amount of trolling in A Matter of Interest and we'll get lost in the weeds if I tell you about all of it[81].

Maybe this isn't very obvious to anyone who hasn't read a ton of Chambers, but A Matter of Interest feels like Chambers, who was probably wounded from the lukewarmly positive reception to TKiY, decided to tell the world : "I'm so done with trying that I'm not even going to finish this next book of mine. Hell, I've disfigured it for good measure. Here's a story about me giving up and giving you the finger. Have your slop and eat it, you great American Ass (he loved to call the American reading public that)." Unless, maybe, he's just giving a finger to his publishers and his editors for disfiguring his work. Unless this is a form of indirect self-harm. Destroying what you poured your soul into instead of destroying yourself. But maybe he didn't destroy anything, not really, he just went into hiding. Well, that's a stretch isn't it? Sure, maybe he had a planned a sort of sequel to TKiY called The Purple Emperor that he scrapped when it was 80% done or something like that and maybe he even had ideas for a Queen in Green book, but there's nothing to support the assertion that he somehow completed those two books in secret like some kind of weirdo, right? Well, Chambers is a bit of a weird guy and so am I. And once Chambers' strangeness started to become apparent to me and once it started to have an impact on how I approached his work, I did something a bit strange. Grosso modo, after realizing what was going on with the color-coding and as I couldn't stop to think about the insistent presence of what seemed like an archetype for the Queen in Green and another archetype for The Purple Emperor (on top of constantly coming across weird cryptic things in Chambers' work) I tried to

[81] In the vein of that gag from The Demoiselle d'Ys which is highlighted in the annotated TKiY. You know, because Jeanne d'Ys sounds like jaundice if pronounced à l'anglaise (Joan d'Ys).

reconstruct The Purple Emperor and The Queen in Green (and that was back when I was very unsure if there was truly something there) by using three books by Chambers as “guides”. And the thing is… it worked a bit too well. But what I think doesn’t matter, what matters is what you’ll think about certain facts I’ll be sharing with you in just a moment.

As to the “rebuilding”, what I did (to simplify greatly) is to try to replicate the structure of TKiY by following “clues” in the three books that felt the most conspicuous to me. Meaning The Maids of Paradise, The Talkers and The Drums of Aulone. Here’s a quick recap of TKiY’s table of content before I tell you what I ended up with :

The epigram : Cassilda’s Song in “The King in Yellow,” Act I, Scene 2.
Number 1 : The Repairer of Reputations (A story which could easily have been called The King in Yellow.)
Number 2 : The Mask
Number 3 : In the Court of the Dragon
Number 4 : The Yellow Sign
Number 5 : The Demoiselle d’Ys
Number 6 : The Prophet’s Paradise
Number 7 : The Street of the Four Winds (Seven, Severn, Elven.)
Number 8 : The Street of the First Shell
Number 9 : The Street of Our Lady of the Fields
Number 10 : Rue Barrée

Here’s what I ended up with for The Purple Emperor (if no there's no precision its from TMoC) :
The epigram : Song of the Undertaker from “The Inca” (Chaské) (That’s from Iole.)
Number 1 : The Purple Emperor (Probably renamed The Mystery of Choice.)
Number 2 : Pompe funèbre
Number 3 : The Key to Grief
Number 4 : The Messenger
Number 5 : L’Ombre (This one has been transformed into a couple of chapters for Barbarians, but it can also be read as a standalone story in the June 1916 issue of Hearst's International. It’s on HathiTrust but not yet on archive(dot)org, at least I haven’t found it there.)
Number 6 : Shadows[82] (Meaning that section from Chambers’ poetry book, With the Band. With the addition of The King’s Cradle from The Mystery of Choice. Also, a poem called The Outlaws (In Finistère, 1891) which you can find in the June 1909 issue of The Saturday Evening Post. Although, then again, the format of that poem is perhaps too different then the other to be called a slamdunk.)
Number 7 : Passeur (With the fuller epigram which you can find in the October 1897 issue of The English Illustrated Magazine.)
Number 8 : The Little Misery (From The Haunts of Men.)
Number 9 : The White Shadow
Number 10 : Collector of the Port (From The Haunts of Men.)

[82] Which starts with an epigram from Walt Whitman.

Meanwhile, here's the table of content for The Queen in Green :
The epigram : Sylvia's Aria from "Sylvia Elven" (Hawthorn[83] Song) (From The Red Republic.)
Number 1 : The Maker of Moons (From the book of the same name.)
Number 2 : The Carpet of Belshazzar (Probably renamed The Tree of Heaven, which was its original name.) (From The Tree of Heaven.)
Number 3 : The Case of Mr. Helmer (From The Tree of Heaven.)
Number 4 : The Silent Land (From The Maker of Moons.)
Number 5 : The Black Water (From The Maker of Moons.)
Number 6 : Vagrant Verses (That's another poem section from With the Band. But you have to remove the two out of place poems, those being Good Sir Guy and The Worm Turns. As for the epigraph, I think it's the poem Desolation from a book called A Lute of Jade, which Chambers quotes in The Business of Life (at least in the serialized version, he removed most of the quotes in the book version), but I'm not confident enough to say for sure. I might be completely off-track for that one.)
Number 7 : The Sign of Venus[84] (From The Tree of Heaven. And yes, despite the name I'm pretty sure this goes here. Names are important in Chambers but structure and themes are more important.)
Number 8 : Ambassador Extraordinary (From The Haunts of Men. Which is also true for the next two.)
Number 9 : Another Good Man
Number 10 : Enter the Queen

Now, maybe this exercise only worked because I know Chambers' work almost inside and out and because Chambers liked to recycle stories and because I was able to cherry pick the most fitting ones. Sure, it's a possibility and you should keep that possibility in mind. But what do you make of the following information?:

There is an excerpt of a Walt Whitman poem that appears only twice in Chambers' 87 books. Once in The Maker of Moons (1896) and once in The Talkers (1923)[85] which obviously takes its name from it.

In The Silent Land, the King of Carcosa, The Man in Purple Tatters and a queen who makes everything green are mentioned in very close succession. (Them and the Seventh Seal.)

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[83] Hawthorne is aubépine in French. In The Messenger, the character of Lys says that she "will bring the first primrose, the first branch of aubepine, the first jonquil" to the king (her king).
[84] The sign of Venus is mentioned in Love and the Lieutenant (1934/1935).
[85] From The Maker of Moons (which has three epigrams from Whitman back to back): "I have heard what the Talkers were talking,—the talk / Of the beginning and the end; / But I do not talk of the beginning or the end." From The Talkers: "Sutton was becoming perplexed and troubled, wavering between a boyish need and a boy's respect for The Talkers—"The Talkers who talk of the Beginning and the End."

There is an excerpt from Vathek (about death and the underworld) that appears only twice in Chambers' work, once as the epigram for The Little Misery[86] (1898) and once in The Talkers[87].

The name Fantozzi appears only thrice: In The Talkers, in Ambassador Extraordinary (1898) and in The Case of Mr. Helmer.

(This one I've discovered only after having made my "mixtapes".) There's an alternate epigram for The Messenger, one that appeared in the February 1897 issue of Scribner's Magazine. It says : Into the silent land, who will lead us across? in German. The Messenger is the fourth entry in my "reconstructed" Purple Emperor, just like The Silent Land is the Queen's fourth entry.

In The Drums of Aulone, Hastur shouts "Game afoot" just before we come across a body of water called L'Ombre. Again, the word Ombre (capitalized) only appears in one other place, the short story called L'Ombre. A story which is like a more realistic take on The Demoiselle d'Ys (which, you know, features Hastur). It's also a romantic idyll that feels a bit outside of time (although in a more realistic way) and which takes place in Brittany. The Demoiselle d'Ys ends with a yellow-coded tragedy (delusion/disconnection from reality) and L'Ombre ends with a purple-coded tragedy (death).

In Iole, in the passage which contains the song from The Inca, there is also something written about "the talkers" and about dead art being resurrected.

The Carpet of Belshazzar is, for all intents and purposes, the story of The Talkers but told in miniature form. It also has to do with ciphers.

Like Rue Barrée, the last story in TKiY, Enter the Queen ends with Selby exiting "the stage".

In The Maids of Paradise, we find references to several characters which appear in The Mystery of Choice or The Purple Emperor, if you prefer. You've got Jeanne the passeuse from Passeur[88], you've got Mr.Terrec from the story related to Dick, Lys and The Purple Emperor, you've got a character known only as "the messenger" who speaks about Ker-Ys. Oh, and Terrec also appears in the poem Outlaws (In Finistère, 1891). And of course, you've got a Sylvia Elven but that relates to TKiY. There's also a conspicuous mention of a green lizard from the gorse in both The Maids of Paradise and in The Messenger (also Sylvia Elven is first introduced wondering at a lizard in TKiY).

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[86] In that story, the protagonist sings a "Quebec song" which contains the lyric "Mossieu Meenoose" (Monsieur Minou; Mister Kitty) while The Sun Hawk has its own Quebec song about cats called "Ma'mzelle Minoose" (Miss Minou; Miss Kitty). Reminds me that there is a crucial institution called The Black Cat from The Rake and The Hussy and relating to it, there's this bit: "It's in the street of the Singing Cat—Le Chat qui Chante! Black Yvonne does my laundry."

[87] From The Little Misery: "If you be dead also and are come hither to join us, I pity your lot, for you will be stunned with the noise of the dwarfs and the storks." From The Talkers: "And he thought of Vathek, and the "noise of the storks and the dwarfs." And he thought of the little daughter of Jairus, too. And of Gilda lying dead in her green mask."

[88] interesting to note that the title of the story is a retroactive spoiler if you know French. As in passeuse is feminine and passeur is masculine. And, well, the protagonist doesn't come across Jeanne the passeuse, he only thinks he does, he actually comes across The Purple Emperor/The Man in Purple Tatters aka The Ankou aka Old Man Death.

There's also the fact that The Seal of Solomon is a "remake" of The Sign of Venus with two added elements: the search for a lost person and the breaking of a cipher.

Every single "spot" contains mirroring with the other "spots" in this "Mardi Gras" trilogy (both structurally and thematically; it's not math but damn those it works). Here's one of the best examples: The Court of The Dragon from The King in Yellow and the two stories that occupy the third spot in The Purple Emperor and in The Queen in Green, meaning The Key to Grief and The Case of Mr. Helmer, are all stories made of the same mold. You've got a chase which is interrupted by an interlude that lulls you into a false sense of security and which is itself later interrupted by the complete dissolution of that false sense of security. All three stories end with their respective entities making a speech[89]. That's The King in Yellow in The Court of the Dragon, Death itself in The Key to Grief and one of the avatars of the Queen in The Case of Mr. Helmer. All three protagonists are chased because of a color-coded sin they have committed (disconnection between deeds and beliefs in TKiY, murder in TPE and the forgetting of a loved one in TQiG).

Like I've said previously, The King in Yellow works as a sort of color gradient. And that logic also applies to the Emperor and the Queen. More than that, together they even work as a sort of infinite loop. The King in Yellow starts with a delusional power-fantasy, it starts as yellow as can be. Meanwhile, it almost ends with a murder and it actually ends with a sobering cold hard look at reality. So very purple-coded. The Purple Emperor starts with a lot of deaths and it ends with death being defeated by love. The Queen in Green starts very green and it ends with a story called Enter the Queen. What does the character referred to as the queen do at the end of said story? She leaves. Who remains? A bunch of young men on an hedonistic rampage which straddles the line of acceptability. Yellow is reintroduced, the loop goes on. *"All this has happened before"* says the amnesiac hero of The Golden Pool (pool which is loop mirrored). Maybe that's a spurious link to make but mysterious pools and flashy fishes reappear often enough (and usually in very key parts of the stories in which they appear; including in one cipher) to make me wonder if it's not one of the keys to all this.

Speaking of which, In the Quarters start with a character receiving a green sign, a character loses himself in the shadowy realm of death and finally, we get a strange climactic performance of La Belle Hélène. A queen is crowned and then dies, the quote-unquote "mad chorus of Kings" is heard and we are told to both "Fear Calchas!" and "Let Calchas fear!" By the way, Calchas is a mythological character from Greek Myths who had the ability to see past, present and future. Like a certain sybil, or at least a character who is compared to a sybil (Camilla from Ailsa Paige who predicts the death of someone's piece of mind). Oh, and he is also dressed entirely in yellow. At least he is in Offenbach's opera. Also, decades later, a street named after Calchas would appear in The Talkers.

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[89] "Ihó! Behold the end! The earth alone lasts. The sand, the opal wave on the golden beach, the sea of sapphire, the dusted starlight, the wind, and love, shall die. Death also shall die, and lie on the shores of the skies like the bleached skull there on the Key to Grief, polished, empty, with its teeth embedded in the sand." This is the ending of The Key to Grief; if that's not a speech, I don't know what is. Kind of reminded me of Lovecraft's "That is not dead which can eternal lie, / And with strange aeons even death may die."

[Ciphers of Your Mind] Wherever You go, There You are

So hopefully, are you pretty convinced that Chambers was playing some kind of literary game with his unknowing public? No? Well, there are ciphers too and they are part of an often pretty explicit web of connections. And since those connections are separated by decades, one might be forgiven for wondering if the ciphers don't have a use outside of the stories they appear in. So, this web of connections, it concerns two actual ciphers (maybe three), The Four/Five Horsemen of the Apocalypse (aka The Stonish Giants, probably[90]), The Seventh Seal (which lets loose the aforementioned horsemen if broken and brings about the apocalypse) and Solomon's Seal[91]. Here's kind of how it plays out:

The Silent Land (1896): The Seventh Seal and Carcosa are mentioned in the same breath (alongside a queen who makes everything green and The Man in Purple Tatters). In fact, it's the last story where Carcosa is ever named directly. Which is thematically fitting considering that the breaking of the 7th seal "indicates that the first act of the mystery has ended, and another is about to begin" (and that it brings about a great silence). The Talkers include a very Silent Land-like interlude ("still places" ; "solitude is in the soul") and a very conspicuous dictionary which is mentioned just before a passage which echoes all that stuff I just mentioned in The Silent Land.

Solomon's Seal (1906) and In Secret (1919): Solomon's Seal is both the name of a story and of the cipher at its center. As for In Secret, it directly refers to The Seal of Solomon. And it's about a cipher breaker character called Evelyn Erith who serendipitously finds a man called Kay McKay from Isla (Is-là?/Is-there?) who knows the "Great Secret". (In Solomon's Seal, a cipher is broken in order to find a woman called Edith Inwood.) In Secret includes an absolute barrage of TKiY-like imagery and it has a completely different use of capitalization (unmotivated by context or character; stuff like "GOOD-evening" when nothing intense is going on) than is usually found in RWC. Also, the only code-book in all of RWC's work (who is cryptography obsessed in case it needed to be said) is a dictionary from In Secret ("Maybe that's the key? [...] "Why—why, it's a DICTIONARY!"). The only copy I could find is in Saarbrücken. I also have a weird feeling that there is a red herring concerning the Seal of Solomon but it's probably nothing (anyway, it's in the doc.).

The Fifth Horseman (1930): In which we are told about the titular red-coded Fifth Horseman and in which the playwright protagonist finally completes the much anticipated 2nd act of the titular play ("There's your devilish second act"). He also says that he has hidden its real ending/third act. The final 5 words of the book are "The Apocalypse of the Commonplace" (it ends with it). Ah, good, so Maids-At-Arms confirm that the Horsemen are loose and this confirms that the Apocalypse has already happened. I guess we're safe then.

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[90] It's never explicitly confirmed (unless I forgot about it) but the parallels are super obvious.

[91] From Wikipedia: "some believe that the Beast of the Earth, which should appear near the Last Judgment day, will come bearing "the Seal of Solomon."" It comes from Islamic eschatology but Chambers was pretty knowledgeable about Islam (see The White Shadow and The Slayer of Souls, amongst others).

Oh yeah, and like I said, Secret even gives us a code-book. That's the 1896 edition of The Etymological and Pronouncing Dictionary of the English language by James Stormonth. If by any chance this has piqued your interest and you live in Saarbrücken (a copy of it is in the Saarland University Library), or if you know where to find another copy of that book, please don't hesitate to get in touch. Or to share a numerization of it with the world. And by the way, for those who know ciphers even less than I do, it really needs to be this specific edition.

I wish I could tell you more about the ciphers themselves (what types of ciphers they are, how they work, if the solving of them even makes sense in the context of their stories) but just rereading the passages in question sets my teeth on edge. Trying to understand the basis of cryptography makes my head swim and apparently numbers are akin to kryptonite to me. I thought about flexing that part of my brain by trying to understand how the Trithemius cipher works (the foundational documents of the Golden Dawn were written with it) and it's like I couldn't stop my eyes from glazing over the moment I began to read about it. I tried to watch Esoterica channel's video on Trithemius and it made me feel like I was falling into a coma (not because it's bad; in fact, it's a great video and channel, but it's overwhelming for a neophyte[92]). So, I'll suggest you check them out yourself and I'll stick to highlighting how deeply weird the stuff that surrounds them is in the hope that someday someone with the appropriate cryptography knowledge takes a deeper look.

Actually, let me at least give you the excerpts I was writing about earlier (abridged to make the resonances shine all the more). The first excerpt is from The Silent Land, the second from The Messenger, the third from The Talkers and the fourth from The Silent Land again (from earlier in the story):

"I must speak," he said; "are you ready?"
I did not reply.
"Sadness and silence have no place here, between you and me. Shall I tell you a story I once read?"
"I am half asleep," I muttered.
"This is the story," he said, unheeding my words. "There was once a King in Carcosa—"
My hand fell heavily upon the table.
"—And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies—"
"For God's sake, Ferris—"
"Yes," he said, "for God's sake." [...]
The Spirit-bird was tapping on the window, I heard the noise of wings beating against the pane.
"I must go," I said, and my voice sounded within me as from a great distance.
"Vengeance is God's," said Ferris, quietly: "I am guilty." [...]
Then the door slowly opened from without [...] And out of the night came a slender figure, with dark eyes wide [...]
"I came from the Silent Land," she said; "the bird lead me; see, it has entered with me, Louis."

. . . .

[92] It can be watched here.

“Lys de Trevec? Then why in the world did the Purple Emperor——”[...]
After a silence I said: “I will tell the king stories. His Majesty shall be amused.”
“His Majesty,” repeated Lys softly.
“Or hers,” I laughed. “Who knows?”
“Who knows?” murmured Lys, with a gentle sigh.
“I know some stories about Jack the Giant-Killer,” I announced. “Do you, Lys?”
“I? No, not about a giant-killer, but I know all about the were-wolf, and Jeanne-la-Flamme, and the Man in Purple Tatters, and—dear me! I know lots more.”
“You are very wise,” said I. “I shall teach his Majesty English.”
“And I Breton,” cried Lys jealously.
“I shall bring playthings to the king,” said I—big green lizards from the gorse, little gray mullets to swim in glass globes, baby rabbits from the forest of Kerselec——”
“And I,” said Lys, “will bring the first primrose, the first branch of aubepine, the first jonquil, to the king—my king.”
“Our king,” said I; and there was peace in Finistère.

. . . .

[But] he tried to speak lightly:
“—There was once a little Queen in Green who returned a kiss I gave her—"
"I can't—anymore.”
"Why?"
She was silent. [...] "I meant that I must consider myself... . Indiscretion is a temptation when I'm with you."
He drew a swift breath of delight and relief : "But, Gilda dear, there is nothing to be afraid of with me! [...] Because there's nothing rotten about me—"
"How do you there there isn't about me?" [...] But now, I’m afraid… . Because I—I am not the same girl you kissed at Derring's. That girl died. [...] I know I died... . And when my soul—or whatever it is called—tried to reenter my body she found another occupant there!
"Another—soul?"
"Yes, a stranger. My own soul drove her out! I saw the other one. [...] I tell you," she said in a low hurried voice, "that the Other One is watching us. I've got to be on my guard."
"You darling. You need not be—"
"Stuart!—for God's sake—listen—"

. . . .

“So I am crowned,” she said, “a princess in the Silent Land. Where I step, all things green shall flourish; where I turn my eyes, blossoms shall open in the summer wind;—am I not queen?”
“Will you not sing again, Diane?”
“No, it pleases me to hear a legend now. You may begin, Louis.”
“Which—the Were-wolf or the Man in Purple Tatters or the—”
“No, no—something new.”
“The Seventh Seal?”
“Begin it.”
“And when he opened the Seventh Seal there was silence in Heaven—”

“Dear Saints, have we not silence enough in the Silent Land? Tell me about battles.” ‘“And the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.’ I could tell you about battles, Diane.”
“Tell me,—don’t move your arm,—tell me of battles, Louis.”
“There was once a King in Carcosa,” I began.
But the little maid was already asleep. I thought I heard a step in the undergrowth and listened.

By the way, the Queen in Green’s shelf also includes books by Maurice Maeterlinck. Maeterlinck is referred to thrice and so is the dictionary. I kind of hope that doesn’t mean that other books are necessary to solve the ciphers (imagine if it was that book he sent to the journalist). ‘Cause now that I’ve read Drums of Aulone, I know that the number three is quite suspect. That book has 68 triads, a lot of conspicuous color-coding and a lot of stuff about the cardinal directions. And I guess, I should tell you more about Kay of Isla. He’s a Scottish-American man. Chambers loved all Celtic Nations but none more so than Scotland. Here’s what he says about it in the book:

"Ah, wait! This Scotland is no strange land to good Americans. It's a bonnie, sweet, clean bit of earth made by God out of the same batch he used for our own world of the West. Oh, Yellow-hair, I mind the first day I ever saw Scotland. 'Twas across Princess Street—across acres of Madonna lilies in that lovely foreland behind which the Rock lifted skyward with Edinburgh Castle atop made out of grey silver slag! It was a brave sight, Yellow-hair. I never loved America more than at that moment when, in my heart, I married her to Scotland."

And, well, Kay is a name whose etymology relates to the word key. And as you might have noticed, Chambers loved words that sound alike and Kay of Isla sounds a lot like the Key to Is. You know, like the keys that Dahut wears around her neck. Maybe it’s just me but there is this weird emphasis on necks in In Secret. In fact it ends with the heroine clasping her lovers’ neck in his arms. Erith ends the book with her hands around the neck of a guy whose name means key. And you know what? Isla sounds like Is and Là in French; meaning (Ker-)Is There or Is Over There. Am I reaching? Maybe, but you would too if you had read In Secret. That book is capital-S strange. Here’s another excerpt:

"Such things can NOT happen!" she said aloud. "Such things do not happen in life!"

And she told herself that even in stories no author would dare—not even the veriest amateur scribbler—would presume to affront intelligent readers by introducing such a coincidence as this appeared to be.

"Such things do NOT happen!" repeated Miss Erith firmly.

Such things, however, DO occur.

Was it possible that the Great Secret, of which the Lauffer cipher letter [as in Herman Lauffer a character who has both a cipher and a code-book for it] spoke, was locked within the breast of this young fellow [Kay McKay] who now lay unconscious in the Samaritan Hospital?"

By this, I wanted to highlight that this book is full of random all caps words (like a lot more than is usual for Chambers). Like full of them. "GOOD-evening"; "I'm GOING"; PLEASE don't"; "… proposing to go OUT"; "… what you propose to do OUTSIDE…"; "You ARE cold"; "Also the winds had become prophetic, blowing out of the valleys and UP the slopes."; "She sold ME!; "And then, Recklow, GOD'S HAND MOVED!—very slightly—indolently—scarcely stirring at all…."; "AND EVERY ONE OF THEM WAS INSANE". Just frankly bizarre, which fits with the whole book as it is one of the strangest things I've ever read. You feel like you're going mad reading it. Not always in a fun way. That's true both in terms of story (the only book that feels as unhinged as this one is Slayer of Souls which, like I said, feels like borderline QAnon stuff at points) and imagery.

Worth noting is that, at one point, Kay almost drowns. And so does Evelyn Erith, the other main character from In Secret. She's also a cipher-breaker, her nickname is "Yellow hair" and her name means "the desired one from the old port". In fact, she performs an almost supernatural feat of underwater swimming. One that makes Kay fear for her life and wonder if she hasn't drowned in what he calls the Isla Waters. This specific almost supernatural ability and this specific story beat happens in only one other book by Chambers, The Maids of Paradise (a book which happens to mention ciphers in passing). Who does it concern there? Jacqueline, aka The Flying Mermaid of Ker-Ys. How does Chambers describe the inhabitants of Ker-Is in his work? He calls them *"witches"* and *"golden people"*. Drowning with their city made them golden. And well, every time Isla is named there is a deluge of golden and yellow things mentioned and the presence of a lot of KiY-related imagery.

There's even a Yellow Sign equivalent and the mention of a pallid star. Speaking of The Yellow Sign, in that story, the sign itself appears on a wearable clasp. In the story The Sign of Venus, the sign of the Queen in Green, also called the Sign of Venus, appears on a ring. We don't get the name of the woman who wears it but in The Seal of Solomon, the other story with a cipher in it, there is a woman who is named and who stands at the center of a mystery. Why is that relevant? Because The Seal of Solomon is a retelling of The Sign of Venus. It adds just two things : the search for a missing person and a cipher. The woman at its center is named Edith Inwood. Not only is the name Erith and Edith pretty damn close (also Erith sure sounds like Eris), but Edith Inwood is an extremely green and queen coded name. It also has to do with Queen Edith of Wessex, The Battle of Hastings and her brother Harold who died there, but that would be complicated to explain. For now, let's just say there is a very important character called Hastings in The King in Yellow and that Harold is the name that was given to the protagonist of A Matter of Interest when it was later repurposed by Chambers for In Search of the Unknown. In any case, the name of Edith Inwood, fits the etymological pattern of the queenly green characters. Helen Pine, Yvonne Descartes aka La Belle Hélène (Helen of Troy), Queen Sylvia aka Lina, et cetera. And it's also reminiscent of Edythe Landes Castaigne. Also, Edith wears a ring with several v-shapes in the story she appears in. So while both books in

which we find the ciphers are associated with Chambers' lore in general, one is more heavily yellow-coded and one is more heavily green-coded. And consider this passage :

"Child," said the Tracer of Lost Persons, "the Seal of Solomon is a splendid mystery. All of heaven and earth are included within its symbol. And more, more than you dream of, more than I dare fathom; and I am an old man, my child—old, alone, with nobody to fear for, nothing to dread, not even the end of all—because I am ready for that, too. Yet I, having nothing on earth to dread, dare not fathom what that symbol may mean, nor what vast powers it may exert on life. God knows. It may be the very signet of Fate itself; the sign manual of Destiny."

What a Modest Man this Chambers. Oh, and did I tell you that in one story Chambers tells us that the cat is destiny? Perhaps like Solomon the cat from The Silent Land whose name echoes a certain seal which is said to be the sign manual of destiny. In any case, this reminds me of a previous passage from Eris which I've already quoted. Does it also remind you of it? Maybe I'm seeing things, but maybe those passages are worth keeping in mind. Like this one:

"You know," said I, "what keys unlock the meaning of all stories? [...] The keys of The Past…"
She sighed, looking down into her smooth little empty hands:
"I threw them away, long ago," she said. "For me there remains only one more door. And that unlocks of itself." (The Adventures of a Modest Man[93])

What if we took it seriously? And then there's this bit from another book with an important cipher in it: *"Could the key of the cipher be French?"* (Like when it concerns Is-Là?). This line is from Who Goes There and if you think I'm making leaps of logic, you should see with what kind of logic that cipher is solved. But does this have anything to do with the fact that Isla sounds like Is-là in French? Is (like the city), there/over there. Or that if you're bilingual the name Louis Malcourt kind of sounds like "lui la mauvaise court; "him the bad court[94]". But I won't tell you too much about that "language of the birds" stuff because I'll probably lose you (meaning you'll think I've lost it.) And what to make of the cipher breaking scene of Who Goes There which I urge you to check out if it interests you.

Again, I'd like to tell you more about those ciphers but they aren't my forte and looking at them or even re-reading their descriptions make my eyes glaze over. It's less information that I read than information that I see and I'm having trouble making sense of it. They are like hieroglyphics to me and well, as it says in The Seal of Solomon, *"I am not able to decipher hieroglyphics"*. Which is annoying because Chambers kept describing the central one as being childishly

[93] There is a Café Jaune (Café Yellow) in The Adventure of the Modest Man. What to make of that (if anything)?

[94] It might be dangerous to go too far with that "language of the birds" stuff (I can tell you that following free association-type thinking as sent me spiraling a bit too much and not always in useful avenues) but it's interesting to note a lot of the characters named Louis (as well as those who have kingly names like Richard/Dick and others) seem to embody autobiographically inclined aspects of Chambers. So the lui/him vs. Louis thing might not be that far-fetched. And remember Louis Aulone who went to Solitude alone! So who knows, maybe the mysterious name Uoht from TKiY is meant to be "thou" spelled backwards. And maybe there is something to the fact that Yhtill, The Lake of Hali, Athalie and the water nymph Ythali all kind of sound alike. And if the "I mean it like it looks" bit is not too far off too, maybe the fact that the Great Sacandaga Lake in Northern New York (which is situated at the southwestern tip of Broadalbin where Chambers spent his childhood summers and where Katherine Husted lived; more on her and her yellow house in just a moment) is known for being shaped like a "y" means something.

simple, so maybe it's not even very difficult to break it if you're even a little cipher-literrate. Then again, that screams red-herring to me. I'd bet my hair that there are some of those scattered about to throw off the scent (keep the hounds of your track[95]); to make one think there's nothing there or that it's just a bit of silly fun. And obviously, I don't think this is just silly fun because, well, this spanned 30-something years and also because, as you've seen, it's a freaking trauma zone in there. So red herrings. You know, in case one "Great American Ass" (the term he uses to describe the average American) accidentally got it. I mean, if Chambers went to the absurd lengths of hiding stuff in his work, he didn't travel that length without taking his profound elitism with him. And his contempt for working-class men in particular was second to none (jokes on you, Bobby, I'm a working-class man), so you betcha he probably didn't want anyone stumbling into this who wasn't "good enough". Or, if we want to be more charitable (or fair), someone who wouldn't be exploring all this with his *"hand on the man's shoulder"* to quote The Common Law. Hopefully, despite mistakes along the way and having an approach that's far from perfect, I've managed to do so. In any case, I do have a lot of empathy for Chambers (or the parts of him that deserve it, he was kind of a racist, classist jerk). Some of this stuff seems to suggest he had a very rough early life. But hey, maybe I'm being paranoid about the possibility of red herrings.

But before I end this by telling you a story, a fairly speculative one, although it's based on the reading of 87 freaking books, I'd like to share the following with you. During the research process for this whole thing, I stumbled upon a video by Adam Walker on Le Morte D'Arthur and I was struck by something he quoted from Michel Vinaver and by something he himself said. First, here's Vinaver:

"Just as in a tapestry each thread alternates with an endless variety of others, so in the early prose romances of the Arthurian group numerous seemingly independent episodes or 'motifs' are interwoven in a manner which makes it possible for each episode to be set aside at any moment and resumed later. No single stretch of such a narrative can be complete in itself any more than a stitch in a woven fabric; the sequel may appear at any moment, however long the interval. But the resemblance goes no further, for unlike the finished tapestry a branch of a prose romance has as a rule no natural conclusion; when the author brings it to a close he simply cuts the threads at arbitrarily chosen points, and anyone who chooses to pick them up and interweave them in a similar fashion can continue the work indefinitely. [...] [T]he romance writers [...] build up their narrative in such a way that each episode [appears] to be a digression from the previous one and at the same time a sequel to some earlier unfinished story." (I added a bit of it from the original context of the quote.)

And now, from Walker :

"We get a sense of this intangled world, a world wherein the boundaries between sleep and waking, dream and reality are blurred, where the veil between the living and the dead is thin, where destiny is inescapable and where a golden age comes to a close. The world in this story is porous, which is is a term that the philosopher Charles Taylor has claimed to characterize the

[95] Speaking of which, when Hastur shouts "Game afoot", it's during a hunt led by hounds.

medieval world. Influences, people, powers go back and forth, they aren't buffered or boundaried."

To me, that describes very well a core aspect of Chambers' work (or at least it does so for The King in Yellow, The Purple Emperor, The Queen in Green and a few more things). And, well, Walker also talks about how knowing what the genre of a work is changes how you approach it and what you see in it. If you approach Chambers' Mardi Gras project as an attempt to make a modern medieval romance, you might see different things in it. If you approach it as cosmic horror, you'll see something different. If you approach it as an attempt to find a middle path between modernity and tradition, you might find other things. And if you approach it as a sort of ARG or literary treasure hunt… God knows what you might find. (Lots of maps, submerged treasures and other weird things (a mention of invisible ink[96]) in late Chambers; who knows how far a rich eccentric can go when it comes to his own little delirious literary project. Literary nesting dolls perhaps?)

Now, I might be presenting this in a fairly straightforward way (relatively speaking) but as you can imagine, it wasn't a straightforward process to find all this. In fact, it took quite a long while for me to realize that there was something there. Something concrete, I mean, not just weird/interesting resonances (that I saw much earlier but… weird/interesting resonances usually don't mean there's something hidden). And when I started to wonder if there was indeed something hidden there, I also started to wonder if I wasn't seeing things. As you can imagine, this was quite the roller-coaster to go through. And this whole process of making sense of any of this was incredibly long, convoluted and time-consuming (thank god I don't have hair on my head to lose or I would have lost them). And it demanded a lot of cognitive juice. And you know, I won't go into more details because it's not really relevant to all this, but as fun and exciting as this was at times, I kind of wouldn't wish the experience on anybody. Or I'd wish it on everyone? I kind of both loved and hated this little journey.

[96] One of the crazier ideas (literally based on nothing) I had while researching this came up after I read in Tomlison's biography that there is apparently a notebook belonging to Chambers (which is lost in private hands of some collector) which contains a written debate of sorts between Chambers and himself (about whether or not he should go into painting or writing) in its margins. For some reason, my brain decided to connect that with the invisible ink bit from The Girl in Golden Rags (which is kind of the Carcosa story in a sort of very self-contained pseudo-realistic fairy tale setting; with a house of yellow-oak, a book of fairy tale called Field of the Cloth of Gold (to which the family at its center can trace their origins, like Castaigne can trace his to Carcosa via a book) which keeps being brought, a potential reference to The Golden Pool; another Tessie, et cetera) and the name of certain books. One of Chambers' last books is called Whatever Love Is and I'm pretty sure that the manuscript called Yo El Rey (I, the King) which is an university archive is that book on account of the fact that this expression is used several times in it by the heroine to make fun of the Chambersian hero (except for the last time it is said, which is by the hero). And I thought "What a great title for Chambers' autobiography (I, the Quarter would work too)! Can you imagine if he wrote stuff in the margins with invisible ink?" And then it spiralled into: Ashes of Empire's manuscript title is The Sinful City, maybe that's the Paris part of the autobio.; I don't know what's the manuscript title of Outsiders but in it he calls New York The Iron City, maybe that's the part when he got back to NY; Ys could be called The Sunken City, so maybe the manuscript that contains the hidden bio part about Brittany is Maids of Paradise, et cetera. Obviously, that's a total fantasy and even if it wasn't invisible ink probably doesn't last almost 100 years (I imagine it doesn't, anyway).

Also, I'm sure I've missed plenty of stuff that would make all of this much more convincing[97] because, obviously, I didn't go into this knowing there was something hidden. (And because there's probably plenty of connections I didn't know to make, stuff that I glazed over when reading, et cetera.) And by the time I was pretty sure of it, I had already read some of Chambers most important books. Hell, I've taken hundreds of pages of notes and hundreds of screenshots/pictures of passages of interest from Chambers' books and I must have lost/forgotten so much in that glut of information. At some point I'll go through them and I'm sure it will anger me to no end to see what's in there and the connections that I've failed to make/forgot about (I only just recently stumbled into my notes about the Who Goes There cipher which I had completely forgotten about despite having taken a lot of notes on it). I can't imagine how much worse the experience of rereading some of the books will be. I tried to reread In the Quarter and gave up after not very long because it seemed that every other page there was something relating to all this and I'm kind of overdosing on this right now, I need a break. Plus, well, there's probably a kind of system at play here which I've only sort of partially excavated. Like I said, Chambers color-coded characters, places, things, words, et cetera and he was really into alchemy. What if there is a Great Chain of Being-type system at play? The concept is fairly self-explanatory, here's how it might be playing out in Chambers' work (from a very partial comprehension of it):

Yellow: The King in Yellow, The King of Carcosa, Mr. Wilde, characters who are standing under the yellow sign (as in, it's their principal sign), yellow-coded animals/beings/flowers, an unidentified yellow butterfly (perhaps the yellow-ish Monarch butterfly) and the color yellow itself.

Purple: The Purple Emperor, The Man in Purple Tatters (The Ankou), Mr. Trevec (nicknamed The Purple Emperor), characters who are standing under the purple sign, purple-coded animals/beings/flowers (like the were-wolf), Apatura iris (nicknamed The Purple Emperor[98]) and the color purple itself.

Green: The Queen in Green, Jeanne-la-flamme, the first Ysonde aka the daughter of Yu-Lao (The Maker of Moon), characters who are standing under the green sign (like Gilda Greenway, nicknamed The Queen in Green), green-coded animals/beings/flowers, the Luna Moth (the green-winged moon moth from The Business of Life which bears the name of a queen) and the color green itself.

You start from an unknowable cosmic entity, you descend into the realm of myths and folklore and you descend further into something more approachable before ending with nothing but a color (unless the color should be placed before the cosmic entity). Of course, I didn't do an exhaustive listing and like I've said before, characters aren't usually colored-in with just one type of paint. And we could add places to this whole thing. Carcosa is the yellow variation of the

[97] I've basically written nothing about all the following very important spheres of influences present in Chambers: Ancient Greek/Roman/Chinese mythology, the beliefs of various Native American tribes, universalism, monism, Islam (seemingly of the esoteric kind), medieval literature, Elizabethan theater, modernism, symbolism, et cetera.
[98] That butterfly is also mentioned in The Young Man's Girl.

“realm of the soul”, Ker-Is is the purple variation and Yian is the green variation (unless it's the Yian-connected Marmora).

[Irresponsible Speculations] Hastur Trismegistus and The Mystery of the Hyades

Speculation time. So by now, I hope I’ve at least almost convinced you that there’s not just a KiY but an actual figure/archetype/avatar/influence called The Purple Emperor and one called The Queen in Green. But what if there were more? Remember the color-coded themes[99] I told you about earlier? Well, there are a few more conspicuous capitalized names popping up in key places in Chambers. So what if… ? Well, here's a little story:

There was once a figure called The King In Yellow and while he could easily fill an entire universe with his own fantasies, he wasn’t alone. Around him were the other members of the Hyades Court: his consort The Queen in Green, their son The Orange Prince, their daughter The Blue Demoiselle and their gloomy guest who just won’t leave and which has seemingly always been there[100], The Purple Emperor. The latter sometimes appears under the guise of The Stranger, that’s when he represents death, and sometimes under the guise of The Phantom of Truth, that’s when he represents life without illusions. This court is being visited by two suprahuman influences which guide humanity in different directions. There’s The Red Admiral, who’s the envoy of Biskoona, also known as the abode of lost souls, and The Gray Messenger, who’s the envoy of The White Lodge. The latter sometimes appears under the guise of Hermes, or Hastur the falconer, and sometimes under the guise of Toth, or Piriou Louis the wise elder. And then there’s the universe itself, which is supported by two metaphorical pillars. The Black Water, which could be seen as a kind of chrysalis, and The White Lodge, which could be seen as a kind of imago[101].

Oh, and why is The White Lodge one of the pillars and not red-colored Biskoona? Because Satan is not a god and because, in the end, everyone is redeemed. Once they’ve completed their journey, that is. Or if he is God, he is God’s shadow self and that shadow self needs to be integrated. But there is a tenth figure watching. An outsider to all this who stands aside. That’s our guide, the star Aldebaran. Or, you know, the author, Robert W. Chambers. Or maybe it's

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[99] Speaking of which, it’s probably worth investigating how the Golden Dawn operated with their color-coding. I admit I haven’t looked into it and I’ve only connected some dots related to the HOotGD at the very last minute while finishing this, so I didn’t really have it in me to do a deep-dive about this before I finish this.

[100] “All my instincts, all principles inherent or inculcated; all knowledge spiritual and intellectual, acquired; all precepts, maxims, proverbs, axioms incorporated and lately a part of me, seem trivial, empty, meaningless in sound and in form compared to the plain truths of Death. For never until now did I understand that we walk always arm in arm with Death, that he squires us at every step, coolly joggles our elbow, touches our shoulder now and then, wakes us at dawn, puts out our night-light, and smooths the sheets we sleep under. “I had thought of Death as something hiding very, very far away. Yet I had already seen him enter my own house. But now I understand how close he always is; and, somehow, it has changed—hardened, maybe—much that was vague and unformed in my character. And, maybe, the knowledge is distorting it; I don’t know. All I know is that, before life ends, if there is a chance of fulfillment, I will take it.” From Ailsa Paige.

[101] Then again, maybe both pillars also have corresponding entities.

God, or maybe it's everything or maybe another figure entirely. If there's any tarot influence to this, I guess, it would be the Fool. The Jester or Harlequin? So in other words, there was once a Rosicrucian parade of nine colours being observed by The King of Carnival, The King of Mardi Gras. Ou bin, le Bonhomme Carnaval. But what did it all mean? Well, according to some occultists, the number nine represents the completion of one's cycle of inner transformation. But maybe what we're looking at here is an alchemical parade of the seven classical planets and the two cosmic principles. Or maybe it's a parade of seven metals plus the philosopher's stone and the prima materia. Or maybe it's just a butterfly court from fairyland. After all, several of the names I mentioned also belong to butterflies. Speaking of names, just so you know, all of them, except one, appear as they are in Chambers' work. Capitalized letters included. But maybe what we have here is the seven heavens plus the ogdoad and the ennead. Then again, maybe it's the seven alchemical operations plus the nigredo and the albedo. Then again, again, remove the "y" of Hyades and suddenly it's hard not to think of the 9 circles of hell (are Chambers' commedia dell'arte actors trapped in hell or purgatory?). Does that make The King in Yellow our Dante and The Queen in Green our Beatrice? It sounds like a lot of work in any case, you could even say it sounds like the Great Work. That's another alchemical term, by the way. Achieving the Great Work means that you've created the philosopher's stone and that you've transcended your mortal coil. It's the dissolution of the self into the divine. Now, all of this is of course metaphorical. If it's a philosopher's stone, it's a literary philosopher's stone. If it's an initiation, it's a literary initiation. A nine or ten-step journey. Perhaps one that goes like this: One is gray, two is white, three is purple, four is yellow, five is orange, six is black, seven is green, eight is red, nine is blue and ten is everything (or one is everything and ten is gray). Or it's the Rosicrucian rose.

Again, this is high speculation territory, like I said, but yeah, all those conspicuously capitalized names appear in Chambers' work and like I said earlier, all these colors are associated with specific clusters of themes, places, things, characters, et cetera. Well, all of them except The Gray Messenger but more on him in a minute. As for The Orange Prince, sure it refers to an historical character, but 99% he's referred to as The Prince of Orange, not the Orange Prince and something about that sounded off to me. Especially when you consider what characteristics the color orange is related to. And also when you consider how orange-coded the cruel and arrogant failson of Comte Frontenac (whose super yellow-coded himself) is and the fact that, well, Chambers' son, Robert Husted Chambers, who apparently had alcohol usage and temper issues, was discharged from the army because of his *"psychopathic personality*[102]*"* (I mean, can you imagine what it takes for that to happen around the time of WWII, yikes!). But I also want to tell you about how there might actually be more lost KiY sequels. The first is about the lost work of François Villon:

[102] Also, I can't say for sure but it seems to me that there is more and more negative portrayal of addiction (and stronger types of addiction) as time goes on in Chambers' bibliography. There are several characters who are portrayed very sympathetically in their struggles but, if I'm not mistaken, from late 1910s onwards, there starts to be more and more negatively portrayed "addicts" (although there continues to be some who are portrayed sympathetically. It's a reach to extrapolate but… maybe that has to do with his son's behavior. And there is some stuff in The Younger Sets in the relationship between the protagonist and the younger brother of the girl he loves that feels very raw and real and concerning.

“Ah, yes, my epic! Ballads and chansons I wrote for Katherine. Rondeaux for Anne, who, as I recalled to you, had red hair. But for Marguerite, the divine Marguerite—” he wafted a phantom kiss ceilingwards to the intense disgust of the duke who was listening.
“For Marguerite,” he continued, “I seek something more fitting, something superb, colossal; magnificent in contemplation and executions, ponderous in volume, the eight wonder of the world—in short, my epic.”
“Thus you aspire to the crown of Homer?”
“Thus I aspire.” Then his exalted mood fell from him like a cloak, and his cheerful smirk forewarned me of more liquor.
“You will pay,” I suggested.
“Alas! I cannot. I have spent my last sou on parchment for my epic.”
So the mystery of the valise was solved at last. I weighted it in my hand. If he had all parchments there, the value of them must be above a hundred crowns. I forebode to ask if he brought them all.
“My epic,” said Villon, “is to include twenty books each of ten cantos length."
“And the subject?” I asked.
“Love.”

So, let’s wrap up, what we have here is a story about the lost work of François Villon (Chambers was crazy about medieval literature). He mentions that his magnum opus is 20 volumes long (20 Chinese idols?), that they are 10 cantos each (TKiY is 10 entries long and so are the two lost sequels, if you believe in them), that it is about love and that it is dedicated to the women he has loved. One of which could be said to correspond to the Queen in Green archetype on account of her red hair and of sharing her name with one of the most important examples of it (and who is saved in what amounts to a salvific suicidal fantasy by the most Malcourt-like character in all of Chambers), one has the same first name of Chambers’ older neighbor, Katherine Husted (remember Chambers’ son, Robert Husted Chambers) and the last one is named after a flower and is implied to be deceased (Athalie is compared to a water flower). These three archetypes are in fact titular trio that makes up The Maids of Paradise: a deluded but kind and world-weary countess (who’s taken advantage off by a Gribouri-like figure), a fiery and morally complex character called Sylvia Elven and Jacqueline, the Flying Mermaid of Ker-Ys who survives a practically supernatural feat of swimming. Also, there is a couple age-gaps romance in Chambers, one of which is between a guy and her ex-governess called Kathleen Severn (Severn, like the name of the character who finds the dead Sylvia Elven in TKiY). Also people called Katherine Husted’s place “the yellow house” and it had Italian gardens. In Iole, which partly takes place somewhere called Rose-Cross (like the Rosicrucian symbol), there is a reference to The Firing Line in it (they share an opérette called The Inca) and not long after it appears, it talks about dead art being resurrected and it mentions “the talkers” and, later, it mentions the authors Yeats and Fiona. Perhaps W.B. Yeats and Fiona Macleod/William Sharp? Two authors who were part of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. In fact, William Sharp/Fiona Macleod, who died the year Iole came out, was one of the first champions of Chambers’ writing. And well, the HOofGD was an esoteric order which was heavily influenced by Rosicrucian teachings and which had a color-coding system that rather resembles Chambers’ own.

So, are there 20 books in the TKiY series? 10 related to the solar sign and 10 to the lunar sign? Well, I don't know but maybe the part about The Queen in Green and The Purple Emperor would have been more convincing if I had reconstituted The Blue Demoiselle. The Red Admiral[103], The Gray Messenger and The Orange Prince also. Is there any proof that such books exist? No, there are not. Just contextual clues. But if there is a Blue Demoiselle archetype, it would concern absence, longing and drowning, wouldn't it? Could we reconstitute a book which has the same structure as The King in Yellow, The Queen in Green and The Purple Emperor? What would it consist of?

Could it start with one of the poems about the lost islands of Naxos and Tenedos (The Laughing Girl) as an epigram? Could the first spot be filled by The Harbor-Master (In Search of the Unknown)[104]? The second one by The Whisper (The Haunts of Men)? The third by Out of the Depths (The Tree of Heaven)? The fourth one by A Pleasant Evening (The Haunts of Men)? The fifth one by False Cape (John Tom Alligators and Others)? But at this point my memory fails me and I believe a rereading of the entire corpus of short stories would be necessary, including the few uncollected ones I still haven't gotten to (with an exception or two). Although I have a feeling that Stranger Than Fiction (Quick Action) and Marlitt's Shoe aka The Wistaria Harbor (A Young Man in a Hurry) could be involved. And now that I think about it, I seem to recall reading somewhere that there's a chapter of The Gold Chase (aka Thalassa[105]) that was either published as a standalone story or which works as a standalone story. Then again, I might be mixing up something.

Well, memory alone won't get me there. But still… A Pleasant Evening with its visitation from a drowned person has a similar structure to the other stories about visitations from the dead (The Yellow Sign, The Messenger and The Silent Land). Unless that's Out of the Depths (which is also about being visited by the ghost of a drowned person), except that one is perhaps closer in structured the third spot type (The Court of the Dragon, The Key to Grief and The Case of Mr. Helmer). False Cape is clearly the very watery (it centers around the sea and a lighthouse) out-of-time love idyll of the Demoiselle d'Ys kind. Maybe Cap Gracias A Dios and The Throw-Back should be in there, they are about the sea and drownings, in any case. But I don't remember much more from those. Anyway, you get the picture, even if it's an incomplete and

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[103] The character of Yves Terrec (who is mentioned in The Purple Emperor, The Messenger, Outlaws (In Finistère, 1891) and The Maids of Paradise) is nicknamed The Red Admiral. As for the butterfly which is also called by that name (and from which Terrec derives his nickname), it is referred to in Athalie, Garden-land, Outdoorland, Mountain-land and Forest-land.

[104] First published by itself before being integrated into the fix-up novel In Search of the Unknown.

[105] Thalassa means the sea. From The Laughing Girl: "It was Hercules, wasn't it, Michael? I always get him and his labors mixed up with Theseus. But the Prince of Argolis used address, not bull force… . His mother's name was Æthra… . My mother's name was Æthra, too. [...] And the name of the ancient pal—I mean the name of our old house on the island of Naxos was Thalassa!—You remember the Ten Thousand? [...] You enter from the landward lawn, advance toward the portico—and suddenly, through the marble corridor, a sheet of azure! Thalassa! "The Gold Chase ends thus: "You must love me enough," she said, "and leave no emptiness in my heart for the sea to creep in and fill it… I fell in love with it before I fell in love with you… The Sea… Thalassa!—" Also, the Prince of Argolis and Æthra are mentioned in Lorraine, someone's parents "were lost in the Argolis off Cyprus" in The Younger Set and we learn of a song from "The Prince of Argolis" (a musical or opera of some kind) in The Restless Sex (which parallels The Inca from The Firing Line).

rather unconvincing one. (Oh, but a few stories connect through the journalistic setting, like The Whisper and A Pleasant Evening.)

How about The Orange Prince[106]? Surely, it would contain The Orange Puppy (a story that ended up in Quick Action), [The Story of Pedro Valdez][107] (from Quick Action) which, like The Orange Puppy, is about a treasure hunt, and Our Lady of Lances (from John Tom Alligator) which stars Pedro Valdez himself. And its first story? It should feature a mean older man right? Like Mr. Wilde aka The Repairer of Reputations, like Yu-Lao aka The Maker of Moons, like Mr. Trevec aka the Purple Emperor, like Mr. Halyard aka The King of Yvetot in The Harbor-Master, like Mr. Holroyd aka The Professor in A Matter of Interest. How about A Matter of Medicine? It does feature a mean older man nicknamed The Maker of Medicine. And that story ties into John Tom Alligator which is basically a take on The Little Misery. Maybe Loaves and Fishes too? Now that I think of it, that one is a take on Cuckoo from Barbarians (a story which is not supernatural despite what Wikipedia claims). Loaves and Fishes is about a bunch of creeps going mad on a *"damned island"*. One of those creeps is called Epstein, he whispers in Russian to an octopus and he ends up murdered. Actually, all the creeps end up murdering each other. One can dream.

And how about The Gray Messenger? Would it start with The Man At the Table? Would it essentially be made up of those stories about poor down on their luck people or would that be The Red Admiral? I Imagine The Progress of Janet would be in one of those. Maybe Hell's Ashes. It's a sort of out-of-time idyll, but a familial one (one of the kids is called Jeanne, like Jeanne d'Ys). Where would A Matter of Interest go then? Would being able to "reconstruct" a few more books with stories that match each others' spots contribute to proving that Chambers was doing something intentional here or would it only contribute to proving that Chambers was just fond of repeating himself to save time and energy? To each his own.

But again, is it really 20 books? Like ten short story collections and ten novels, maybe? In the Quarter and Outsiders being TKiY novel-diptych, The Talkers and Eris being the Queen in Green novel-dypitch, Ashes of Empire and The Maids of Paradise being the Purple Emperor diptych, The Drums of Aulone (its very, very orange-coded; orange is even one of the only color in the serialization illustrations) and The Sun Hawk (same) being The Orange Prince diptych? Is the lunar sign feminine and the solar sign masculine? And the other books? Hell, if I know. And all this is pure speculation. But if the short story collections have poem sections that serve as transitions (ascendant signs perhaps), do the diptychs have their own transitions? What are they bridged by? A play? But that's wishful thinking again[108]. And what to make of the fact that

[106] In terms of the Great Chain of Being, if we assume that TKiY's totem butterfly/moth is the Monarch butterfly, perhaps the Prince is represented by a Viceroy butterfly.

[107] It doesn't actually have a name, just chapter numbers, and I haven't found anything that suggests it was published by itself elsewhere. I call it that because that term is used in the story and it makes sense as a title considering what it is about.

[108] That said, it seems that around the late 1890s was finally starting his playwriting career… and it kind of seems like it was cut short by the death of Augustin Daly, who was his partner in crime when it came to theater. So maybe that was one drop too many. The late 1890s seemed to have been a particularly busy (and perhaps difficult) time for Chambers after all. Which really shows in Outsiders. Like I said elsewhere, Chambers could sometimes be condescending towards women but it's clear he much preferred them to men. And yet, Outsiders features some pretty intense misogyny (more bitter than the usual type) and one character in particular whose misogyny is not only

Chambers might be working with implicit tri-partite selves more than (often) explicit dual selves? Well, one last thing. What was that about The Gray Messenger not being a name that appears in Chambers' work?

The Gray Messenger is very much just a guess. One that I made because of the color-coding that's going on with grey and silver and because of the preponderance of capitalized gray and silver names in Chambers' work. But not finding any name that seemed to fit, I started doing some free association; just to see where that would take me. What's associated with gray? Plenty, but there's the gray gulls of Brittany. What does Le Foyer breton tell us is Brittany's most popular pagan god? Hermes, the god of messengers. A guide of sorts. Who appears in two Brittany stories to act as sort of guides? Hastur and Piriou Louis. One who is associated with falconry, flight and messages, and the other is said to be older and is associated with age and worldly wisdom. Hermes and Toth maybe? Like Hermes Trismegistus, the most important figure related with hidden wisdom in all esoteric traditions, an entity who is a mixture of Hermes and Toth?

And then I got to pondering the role of the character of Dr. Archer in The Repairer of Reputations, when suddenly something occurred to me. As we've seen, the letter "y" is very prominent in Chambers' work[109] and, well, this probably going to sound really dumb, but that letter looks like an arrow. So I thought, maybe this entity is an archer? But what about its actual title? Maybe I just missed it. I can't Ctrl+F all of Chambers' work to verify all possible capitalized Silver, Gray or White figures and names since a good handful of his books aren't available digitalized and a few of them that are haven't been properly OCRed. But thematically speaking, doesn't it make sense that the hardest figure to find would be the one associated with hidden wisdom? Maybe that's cope. Anyway, one of my first guesses was The Silver or The Gray Archer. Only, if there's an arrow, it's an arrow to which a message is attached and the archer feels too warlike. And since all the color entities' names have associations with butterflies and moths, I went looking. And guess what? There is a migratory moth called the Silver Y. Migratory animals and messages, those go hand in hand. Hence The Silver Messenger. Or at least I thought so for the longest time but I've finally landed on The Gray Messenger because of a shepherd's cloak. In The Drums of Aulone, one of the most powerful and useful symbols in that book is indeed a gray shepherd's cloak. Michelle of Aulone trades her fancy clothes for this cloak and refuses to go back to dressing like royalty when she's pressured into marriage by some asshole who's dressed in silver. The silver dress is useless and the gray cloak is constantly useful. Plus, well, the character of Hastur is originally a god of shepherds. A complete guess as you can see. But again, like I told you, we're in high speculation territory. And this speculation might be useful because Chambers has been dead for 92 years (or is it 93?) and this puzzle is probably missing some pieces that have been lost to the claws of time (like from when Chambers' son completely ransacked their house or like when private collectors

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unchallenged but kind of presented as a normal reaction to what he has gone through (more or less). In fact, later on (in The Restless Sex? I can't remember), we find a misogynist who admits his I-tell-it-like-it-is type discourse against women (well, his ex in particular) is just him badly coping with the fact that he is the one who messed up his wedding and that it's all just meaningless venom. Later on, in The Talkers, a character has similarly intense misogynist discourse and the protagonist is basically like: "man, off yourself if you think that".

[109] I've written a little something on that which will probably have more weight to the fact that yes, it's relevant.

got their hands of rare Chambersian materials and have decided to keep that they keep those for themselves like dragons sitting on their gold coins). It might not be solvable and if it is, it might require a few leaps. So is Hastur (and Piriou Louis; he never appears without him) actually Hermes Trismegistus? Who the hell knows? All we can do is speculate. But Hermes or Hermes-type figures do show up a lot in Chambers' work. So do Toth-like figures and references to Egypt and the mysteries of the Nile. Here's one pretty clear appearance of a Toth-like figure:

About that time she dreamed, for the first time, that dream which so often re-occurred in after years—that she stood at her open window, naked, winged, restless for flight to some tremendous height where dwelt the aged god of Wisdom all alone, cutting open a human heart that was still faintly pulsating. At eighteen—the year the world war was ended—Eris "graduated." She wrote a little act for herself, designed her own costume, made it, acted, sang, and danced the part. It was the story of a poor girl who prays for two things—a pair of wings so that she may fly to the moon, and a new hat for the journey. Suddenly she discovers a new hat in her hands. The next instant two beautiful little wings sprout on her shoulders. Instantly she takes scissors and snips off the wings and trims her new hat with them. Ready for her journey, suddenly she realises that now she cannot fly. She tears the wings from the hat. Too late. She can't fasten them to her shoulders again. They flutter to her feet. She falls on her knees in a passion of tears. The moon rises, grinning.

And amongst the rotating cast of actors-characters in Chambers' work, two responsibilities are often distributed amongst the cast. One character must act as a distant guide who must show the hero or heroine the way, their role is to remind them of their higher self and of their moral compass, and another character is a more down-to-Earth older figure who teaches the hero wisdom, their role is to make the hero understand what the world is really like. Furthermore, the character who is assigned the role of the rather distant higher-self type of guide is usually far away from the hero or heroine and their guidance is almost exclusively delivered via letters, via messages. Again, Hermes is the god of messages. One of the best examples of a character playing that role is the weirdly distant male love interest from Beating Wings. He's one of those characters who almost only ever interacts with the heroine through letters. Mostly sent from Persia. And Beating Wings is a book that not only mentions Hermes several times but which also mentions the mysteries of the Nile. And it also mentions a dead Pierrot, Red Venice, Omar Khayam who is quoted in TKiY and, well, magical twin suns. Like the twin suns of Carcosa. And there are a lot of parallels between that book in Outsiders and Eris. Which reminds me that Outsiders also has a character who mainly shares his wisdom by letters and a character who possesses more down-to-Earth knowledge.

And you know, there's the preponderance of the "as above, so below" type structure. The slogan of the alchemist. But where does this saying originate? From the Emerald Tablet which is attributed to Hermes Trismegistus. Another figure which is associated with the Emerald Tablet is the Ourobouros. The snake who eats its own tail which symbolizes the cycle of life/death, the unity of the beginning and the end, the one being the all. It goes on forever. Like the looping structure of the Mardi Gras trilogy? Speaking of the Ourobourous, I wonder if the fact that many crawling things have the same etymology (snake/dragon/worm/maggot aka wyrm) is something

that we should keep in mind when dealing with Chambers. Should we include lizards in the mix? There are a few conspicuous lizards in Chambers' work too (sometimes described as being emerald green). Like Sylvia's lizard. Nothing conclusive, I'm afraid.

But before I lose you completely because I sound like a conspiracy theorist (well, I'm pretty sure that ship has sailed), I'll stop right there. I think I've done my part. I mean, nobody was asking me to do this but I felt a weird sense of responsibility to put this out there once it became clear that something wild was going on. I'd like to think that Chambers would have wanted it out there. He didn't put all that stuff in there for nothing. So maybe this will act as a sort of counterbalance to that famous Lovecraft quote: *"Chambers is like Rupert Hughes and a few other fallen Titans–equipped with the right brains and education but wholly out of the habit of using them."* He wasn't out of the habit of using it, just using it in a different way than we would have liked.

Here are a few quotes to end this with:

There are so many things which are impossible to explain! Why should certain chords in music make me think of the brown and golden tints of autumn foliage? Why should the Mass of Sainte Cécile bend my thoughts wandering among caverns whose walls blaze with ragged masses of virgin silver? What was it in the roar and turmoil of Broadway at six o'clock that flashed before my eyes the picture of a still Breton forest where sunlight filtered through spring foliage and Sylvia bent, half curiously, half tenderly, over a small green lizard, murmuring: "To think that this also is a little ward of God!" (The King in Yellow, 1895)

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Unknown, I became Famous; Famous, I remain Unknown. (Police!!!, 1915)

. . . .

"I'm sick of it. Nothing but fiction three times a day! Living this story-book life, and nobody in it but characters in plays and novels and short stories—"
"I'm not fiction," protested Lester, laughing.
"Yes, you are. So is Clarel. So am I. And everything we think and say and do is fiction.... The world, too—nothing but creative fiction.... There's nothing real; never was. So it's rather odd I should miss what never existed. Isn't it, Clarel?"
[...] Seafield gave her a whimsical glance, drew a manuscript from his breast pocket and handed it to Lester: "There's your devilish second act," he said. (The Fifth Horseman, 1930)

. . . .

"No," said Smith, dreamily, "you must not try to. It is a long journey to the summer moon — a long, long journey. I started when I was a child; I reached it a week ago; I returned to-night. And do you know what I discovered there? Why, man, I discovered the veil of Isis, and I looked behind it. And what do you suppose I found? A child, Kingsbury, a winged child, who laughingly handed me the keys of Eden! What do you think of that?" But Smith had taken too many liberties with the English language, and Kingsbury was far too mad to speak. (The Adventures of a Modest Man, 1911)

P.S.: Something to keep in mind. There are sometimes important differences between the book version of certain novels/stories and the serialization versions. Maybe this affects certain passages that relate to the ciphers.

[The Apocalypse of The Common Place] Sources and Thanks

Sources:

Most of my sources were Chambers' books themselves. I think I've sourced all the information I've provided that comes from other people and which is not general knowledge but I'm terribly sorry if I missed some, please let me know. Might also have missed a few sources which are mentioned in the text itself but not here but at least there mentioned (you're not grading a paper are you?).

Douglas A. Anderson. Robert Husted Chambers / Robert E. S. Chambers.

Flawed Peacock. The King in Yellow - Stories Explained.

Marguerite Mooers Marshall. Robert W. Chambers.

Marsh. The Megami Tensei Gaiden: Shinyaku Last Bible II: Hajimari no Fukuin Experience. Unless I'm mixing up my Megami Tensei games, I'm pretty sure this is the video by Marsh in which there is a game with a lot of KiY imagery. Worth citing because I never heard of it anywhere else.

Miskatonic University Department of Literature. Robert W. Chambers. Quite a few mistakes in there but still an important source of info which was particularly useful in terms of magazine publication and getting to know where to look.

PhD&D. "The King in Yellow" in THE REAL WORLD!.

Rick Lai. The Foundations of "The King in Yellow" and the "Necronomicon". I also recommend checking out the Lovecraft eZine Podcast to which Mr. Lai has contributed for years before passing away (rest in peace). It's still a lovely podcast.

Richard Marsh. How I "Broke Into Print".

Shawn M. Tomlinson. Master of The King in Yellow.

The King in Yellow - Annotated by Kenneth Hite (Arc Dream Edition).

Not Quite Sources But Worth Mentioning:

Sean McTiernan. SFULTRA, Explanatory Collapse (on M. John Harrison), Deep Territory and Other Series. Also not a source of information per se, but a great podcaster whose approach in general, and in particular with his deep dives series, has been particularly helpful/inspirational for this research project. Meaning the importance of not taking for granted what's in the secondary literature, of making up your own mind concerning certain consensus (while also considering them), of taking into consideration more deeply the publishing context, who the audience was, et cetera.

Weird Studies. On 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' - Episode 202. Not a source of information per se but highly relevant to the themes of Chambers' work who, as William Sharp/Fiona Mcleaod identified, was very much indebted to R.L. Stevenson (New Arabian Nights and Prince Otto). I believe The Repairer of Reputation is a take on Jekyll and Hyde actually (but as a tri-partite entity; there are a lot of explicit dualities in Chambers, but maybe as much implicit triads). Plus this episode dropped at exactly the right time for me and it really helped tying up together a whole lot of disparate ideas. I wanted to include more about this in the document, but it's already so long and I think I'm not knowledgeable enough about Stevenson to make this really interesting. Now that I think of it, I think Treasure Island is mentioned by name in one the modern pirate adventure books that's in Chambers' late oeuvre.

Thanks:
In order not to make this any longer, I'll refrain from saying much about what went into this research or going into long thank yous but still, a thousand thanks to my close ones (wife, friends, colleagues, family) for their support and/or just for being lovely people. Another large amount of thanks to all the people I've cited as sources here (especially Flawed Peacock, Rick Lai and Shawn M. Tomlinson without whom this assuredly wouldn't exist), to Mr. Bowers for his encouragement, kind comments and useful insights, to the community at the KiY subreddit, to the people who showed an interest when this was still a work-in-progress (on Reddit, Patreon and Youtube; I see you, person who commented about the Golden Dawn color resonance, I should have taken that to heart sooner) archive-dot-org (this also wouldn't have been possible without that website) and to archivists, preservationists and librarians everywhere (whether they are professionals, amateurs or everything in between). Also, my brain works best when it ping-pongs with a plethora of different ideas, so in a sense I feel it's necessary to thank all the podcasters and youtubers I've listened to during the last year (I'm afraid my reading diet was almost exclusively Chambers, so not much nourishment on that front) for the inspiration that they have provided. And sorry to the unhappy few whom I've reached out about this in a rather improper fashion and/or who have read the absolute garbage fire that was the first explainer document. Oh, and thanks to Chambers and his close ones for, well, I'm not sure exactly. Or rather, thanks to the parts of them that were alright and worth appreciating. Not sure why I'm thanking them exactly, but I felt it was important.

And I'd like to dedicate this project to Coco. The world is a better place for having had you in it.